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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

IN THE NAME OF SOMEONE OTHER: POSTMODERN PERFORMANCE, FEMINIST UTTERANCE, AND CULTURAL TERRORISM IN THE FICTIONS OF ANGELA CARTER

BY

DAVID MARK SIMPSON

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "In the Name of Someone Other: Postmodern Performance, Feminist Utterance, and Cultural Terrorism in the Fictions of Angela Carter," submitted by D. Mark Simpson in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The relation of feminist practice to postmodernism is a vexed one. While both aim to demystify forms of authority in discourse, the postmodern attempt to do so itself relies on modes of representation which, themselves extending from phallocentric discourse, come under feminist attack. The resultant tension marking postmodernity poses a series of problems for any feminism whose advocates wish to profit from the transgressive potential in postmodern methodology; this same tension has sparked a number of provocative texts, theoretical and fictional, that grapple with just such problems.

The fiction of Angela Carter represents one such attempt. Yet the transgressions effected in her work are never clear in their implications. They confirm, time and again, that the provocation of unease rather than the prospect of solution motivates Carter in her writing.

Having set the scene in a brief Prelude, in Chapter One I examine critically the canonical invention of postmodernity. Chapter Two attends to issues of representation in Carter's fiction; Chapters Three and Four extend this analysis into the generic realms of gothicism and romance. In my concluding chapter, I offer a view of feminist postmodern performance which, provoked by features and implications found in Carter's fiction, locates its energy in a rhetoric of expropriation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Carterian Prelude 1

Chapter

One: Pretexts 3

Two: Intoxication and Transgression 19

Three: The Gothic Reborn 49

Four: The Romance Re-dressed 73

Five: Post-script 100

Bibliography 113

Carterian Prelude

Scene i: Poststructuralism's castle, deep in the tropics of discourse. Night. Across the courtyard fragments of shape and shadow roam and shift, seeking always the gloom of corners; as they pass, these fragments trade in contradiction, unnaming the nameable in patterns of sound that give voice to themselves more often than to something else--give voice to the One, that is, and not to the Other. This castle's gothic aspect consists not so much in its manifestly terrific qualities as in its distinctly (or, more accurately, its indistinctly) spectral presence; in fact, as one approaches its walls one sees that their interstices mark the joints of absence. Apparently not in the business of protection, these walls, or of the defense of secrets. But what, then, can account for the air of mystery that pervades the place?

Scene ii: Disregarding the absent gates, an intruder weaves among the fragmentary forms that traverse the courtyard and, leaving no name by which to be known, and to which to be held, passes into the great hall at the centre of the fortress. At least, great on first inspection; on second look, however, more properly seen as ingenious. For its size is illusory--an effect of the countless mirrors that cover the heretofore absent walls,

floor, and ceiling. And as these mirrors cast back countless images of a single intruder, countless archways through which her selves have entered, and may exit, the castle's absent secret, its source of mystery, becomes apparent: fearing intrusion just such as this, its makers sought out mirrors in which and from which their image could be cast--mirrors that now show this single intruder, this one, as reflected, refracted others. Her claims to the power of representation, it seems, mean little; as she stands, she is always already represented, and even, one fears, pre-presented in expectation of her intrusion. As she stands, that is--but perhaps not as she moves, lunging to smash a mirror here, a mirror there. And so the narrated breaks narration, herself narrates against the grain, in her violence splitting flesh on the glass she reinvents.

Chapter One: Pretexts

Let me dwell, for a moment, on the image of violence with which my prelude concluded. Postmodernity as a hall of mirrors in which an intruder, en-gendered female, breaks with the grand narrative of the end of grand narratives in order to refract its all too predictable reflections: in effect, then, an image of the self-reflexive space of a culture in crisis (for such, we are told, is the inevitable state of late twentieth century capitalist culture) undone by a crisis it cannot reflect. This is certainly not the only relation of feminism to postmodernity, that of the Other upending the One. It does represent, however, a model for a subversive feminist reinvention of the circumstances and also the possibilities of postmodern spectacle by way of that revered postmodern tactic, violence against the sacred--and in so doing takes postmodernity to be not only a temporal frame of reference, not only an effect of or a move against a culture in crisis, but also a resolutely, securely canonical body of thought in its own right. In view of this assumption, and in the interests of a discussion of the artistic eruption, through the conventional fabric of postmodernity, of Angela Carter, a novelist with certain feminist intentions, it is not only sensible but also politic to begin by tracing the

contours of a canonical pattern in some current discussions of postmodernism, and by considering their implications with regard to feminism.

What follows is a series of statements concerning postmodernity, in which the nexus of what I will term canonical postmodernism may be discerned.

> We must further accept one last freedom: that of reading the text as if it had already been read. . . . rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology ('this happens before or after that'); and recaptures a mythic time (without before or after); it contests the claim which would have us believe that the first reading is primary, naive, phenomenal reading which we will only, afterwards, have to 'explicate,' to intellectualize (as if there were a beginning of reading, as if everything were not already read: there is no first reading, even if the text is concerned to give us that illusion by several operations of suspense, artifices more spectacular than persuasive); rereading is no longer consumption, but play (that play which is the return of the different). If then, a deliberate contradiction in terms, we immediately reread the text, it is in order to obtain, as though under the effect of a drug (that of recommencement, of difference), not the real text, but a plural text: the same and new.
>
> Roland Barthes (1974, 15-16)

> Cultural production has been driven back inside the mind, within the monadic subject: it can no longer look directly out of its eyes at the real world for the referent but must, as in Plato's cave, trace its mental images of the world on its confining walls.
>
> Fredric Jameson (1988, 20)

> . . . when the containers of an autonomously developed cultural sphere are shattered, the contents get dispersed. Nothing remains from a desublimated meaning or a destructured form; an emancipatory effect does not follow.
>
> Jurgen Habermas (1983, 11)

In contemporary society and culture--postindustrial society, postmodern culture--the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation.

Jean-François Lyotard (1984a, 37)

Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name.

Jean-François Lyotard (1984b, 82)

It is no longer then the traditional obscenity of what is hidden, repressed, forbidden or obscure; on the contrary, it is the obscenity of the visible, of the all-too-visible, of the more-visible-than-the-visible. It is the obscenity of what no longer has any secret, of what dissolves completely in information and communication.

Jean Baudrillard (1983a, 131)

Beyond the final principle of the subject rises up the fatal reversibility of the object, pure object, the pure event (the fatal), the mass-object (silence), the fetish-object, the femininity-object (seduction).

Jean Baudrillard (1983b, 103)

Yet almost no women have figured in the [postmodern] debate, even though many analysts include current feminism among the features of postmodernity.

Jonathan Arac (1986, xi)

<u>Master narrative</u>--how else to translate Lyotard's <u>grand récit</u>?

Craig Owens (1983, 65)

Postmodernist writing may be one of our last resources for preparing ourselves, in imagination, for the single act which we must assuredly all perform unaided, with no hope of doing it over if we get it wrong the first time.

Brian McHale (1987, 232)

> Postmodernism works to show that all repairs are human constructs, but that, from that very fact, they derive their value as well as their limitation.
>
> Linda Hutcheon (1988, 7-8)

> What will no longer do is either to eulogize or to ridicule postmodernism en bloc. The postmodern must be salvaged from its champions and from its detractors.
>
> Andreas Huyssen (1986, 112)

Initially, this collection of quotations seems to evince nothing more than contradiction, an inability or unwillingness on the part of commentators on postmodernity to accord their topic much in the way of identity beyond what might be called an obsessive difference from itself. Yet if to say that the essence of postmodernity lies in contradiction is to offer only superficial insight (after all, among its effects postmodern discourse undoes the premise of essentialism as an order of meaning), nevertheless one can argue that the canonical power of the postmodern in contemporary theoretical debates depends crucially for its effect on the snares of contradiction in postmodernity. For at stake in the issue of postmodernism's canonization are not simply its ontology and epistemology, but rather the various and often conflicting circumstances in which it finds ontological and epistemological production. Because, as it is debated, postmodernism enjoys no significant coherence, it achieves the tactical, and so

the canonical, power reserved for those conventions that escape detection. That is to say, the obsessive preoccupation with those stylish contradictions that mark the appearance of postmodernity distracts attention from the conventional generic structures that determine its application.

In hopes of achieving some understanding of this underlay of genre, I wish to posit a set of terms through which to envision its configuration--a set consisting of the related forms of gothicism, romance, and what amounts to a genre of representation. Representations, after all, prove essential in the coherent formulation of a postmodernity that attacks essentials just as it does coherence: from Jameson's confining cave through Habermas' shattered containers on to Baudrillard's pure object, Huyssen's recycling mission, and particularly Arac's figural Woman--for champions and detractors alike, the causes, effects, ills, cures, and gaps of postmodernity, always already unforeseen, nevertheless find their metaphorical and metonymical shapes in the objects that domesticate conventionally phallocentric discourse. And joined with this affection for representation is, alternately, a typically gothic fear of desublimation, destructuration, and obscenity, and a typically romantic desire for heroic action and erotic seduction. If the grand récit of knowledge has,

according to Lyotard, lost its credibility, no such fate threatens the grand récit of the genre of knowledge; in postmodernity, as in all phallocentric discourse, that we know remains uncontested regardless of what we know, even when our knowledge consists simply in a recognition of epistemological futility.

At this point, I wish to reflect on Barthes' playful invocation of rereading. For if his observations offer a virtual rhetoric of the spirit of postmodernity, equally they speak of its political insinuation, at least when read again by feminism. Even as Barthes finds in rereading the capacity to demystify and subvert the hegemony of the first or unique reading, in articulating this discovery he mystifies and fetishizes the subversive. And, as a result, his argument evinces a taint of forgery which, I would suggest, pervades canonical postmodernity. Barthes' advocation of a double(d) vision, an at least two-faced reading practice, inhabits in spirit if not in fact the scene of masquerade, not only because of its insistence on the plural text--the mythologically "same" and the fantastically "new"--but more importantly because its rampant ingenuity masks the quite mundane fact that the grand text of postmodernity has always "already been read" on the adjacent grounds of genre and gender: for this grand text, after all, derives its authority as a

narrative against authoritative narrative on tropes that, as ideological constructs, consecrate the phallocentric hold in and on discourse.

This last assertion requires the support of argument. So, to elaborate: to my mind, one may detect a common bond between the maverick genres of forgery and postmodernity. The thrill and the threat of forgery lies in its existential slipperiness. A forgery cannot be known as such until after its exposure; yet, when exposed, it becomes at once itself (clearly a forgery), and no longer what it had pretended to be (clearly no longer a forgery). Much the same can be said of postmodernity. While it has as its ontological purpose to pass itself off as something else, as an Other instead of the One, at its epistemological level it must become simultaneously what it is and is not: for, when detected, it at once reveals its true colours as a forgery, and stops being one (and therefore Other) altogether. Its revelation, then, marks both a return to its actual identity and a departure from that identity into another--that is, a move into and away from the fake and False, and into and away from the real and True. And in this respect, postmodernity, like any forgery, is necessarily an effect as well as a pattern of rereading, as Barthes construes that concept: the same as it has

been, and yet likewise new, not what it was thought to be--although always, one must add, more same than new.

* * * * *

It is the detection of just such fakery that prompts Meaghan Morris, in her introduction to The Pirate's Fiancée entitled "Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism," to pose the following questions of canonical, "untransformed" postmodernity. "Why," she asks,

> do women artists and feminist theorists count as postmodernist (and as objects of commentary) for [Craig] Owens [in his essay "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism"], but not as 'engaging' in a debate? Doesn't this distinction return us precisely to that division between a (feminized) object-language and a (masculine) metalanguage that feminist theory has taught us to question for its political function, rather than for its epistemological validity? How can [Andreas] Huyssen [in his study After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism] simply cite and confirm what Owens says, while conceding that crucial aspects of postmodernism now would be 'unthinkable' without the impact of feminist thought? . . .
>
> In addressing the myth of a postmodernism still waiting for its women we can find an example of a genre, as well as a discourse, which in its untransformed state leaves a woman no place from which to speak, or nothing to say. (Morris 1988, 14-15)

Morris' questions, and the observation that follows them, locate in "untransformed"--that is, in phallocentric--postmodernist theory the generic and discursive tendency to craft Woman as its ever-absent presence; they likewise imply that this tendency arises from a master narrative that is at once self-reflexive (because it concerns

mastery) and not so (because postmodern theory characteristically sublates such master narratives)--in effect, then, a master narrative that is contradictory, and ripe for deconstruction. Too, they offer a provocative stance from which to begin to examine, not simply the postmodern condition, but rather what exactly conditions that ambitious, didactic postmodernity. And, if the phallocentric pre-texts of doctrinal postmodernism support Barthes' contention that every reading is necessarily a re-reading, the same and the new, they likewise reveal that some re-readings hold more of the same and less of the new, forfeiting novelty (and, along with it, real imagination) for phallocentric legitimation and power.

It is against (or perhaps in spite of) this canonical postmodernity that much contemporary feminism stakes its claims. "After all," as Morris observes, "if postmodernism really has defined a useful sphere for political debate, it is because of the awareness it can foster that its 'world' is finally not so small, so clearly mapped" (Morris 1988, 13). And the crucial importance of tracing over and erasing what clear (phallolinear) maps remain becomes evident in light of Alice Jardine's acute perceptions of (post)modernity:

> Almost but not quite a God . . . Could it be that the end result of the history of technique . . . is the creation of an automaton, a kind of "spirit-in-matter"? Could this be the phantasmatic, utopian end point not

> only of all technical progress but of philosophy itself? A kind of sacred materiality that can communicate nothing detached from itself? A kind of "pregnant matter," as Derrida might put it? So closely associated with Western notions of God, this "spirit-in-matter" is terrifying, unnameable; it can engender itself; it has no need of a mother or father. It is beyond the representation that Man has always presented himself with and controlled. It is, in its essence, an indistinctness between the inside and the outside, between original boundaries and spaces. To think this indistinctness in the twentieth century has been to think a crisis of indescribable proportions, to throw all of the Big Dichotomies into question: for if the exterior is interior, then the interior is also exterior; Man's soul is outside of him-self; history is but the exterior of his own no longer interior imagination. (Jardine 1985, 76)

To attend to and revise what clear maps remain: for as the death of canonization itself becomes canonized, the threat to women of the exterior, "more-visible-than-the-visible" phallocentric imagination becomes, in its manifest confusion, compounded.

* * * * *

Before exploring the ways in which Angela Carter's fictions remap and unmap the borderlands of canonical postmodernity, I wish to consider in detail a final pair of theoretical arguments, the first of which ponders the ideological significance and political value of postmodernism, and the second of which examines the relation of postmodern methodology to feminism. My aim, particularly with respect to the latter, is to find a pattern in the relation of postmodernity and feminism

that can then be read as a figure for conspiracy against phallocentric discourse.

For me, the interest in Hal Foster's essay "(Post)Modern Polemics" lies not in any attention to issues related to those addressed by Morris and Jardine, but rather in its distinction between conservative and subversive forms of the postmodern. Foster contends, at the outset of his piece, that

> In American cultural politics today there are at least two positions on postmodernism now in place: one aligned with neoconservative politics, the other related to poststructuralist theory. (Foster 1985, 121)

He then proceeds to contrast what he takes to be the characteristics of these two positions:

> Neoconservative postmodernism is the more familiar of the two: defined mostly in terms of style, it depends on modernism, which, reduced to its worst formalist image, is countered with a return to narrative, ornament and the figure. This position is often one of reaction, but in more ways than the stylistic--for also proclaimed is the return to history (the humanist tradition) and the return of the subject (the artist/architect as auteur). Poststructuralist postmodernism, on the other hand, assumes "the death of man" not only as original creator of unique artifacts but also as the centered subject of representation and history. This postmodernism, as opposed to the neoconservative, is profoundly antihumanist: rather than a return to representation, it launches a critique in which representation is shown to be more constitutive of reality than transparent to it. And yet, however opposed in style and politics, it is my contention that these two concepts of postmodernism disclose a historical identity. (ibid.)

Foster's final contention notwithstanding, this analysis is doubly significant and doubly attractive to the feminist critic. As Foster construes it,

poststructuralist postmodernism shares several essential concerns with recent theories of feminism, and particularly that of the subject's representation in and by the cultural narrative (although, one must add, only feminism negotiates that concern through the nexus of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation). Of perhaps greater importance to the relation of feminism to postmodernism is that, in Foster's construction, the postmodern advertises the split in its own narrative--a split which virtually ensures that, whatever their historical identity, the two resulting forms of postmodernism do not share a historical destiny. And because postmodernism, in Foster's view, takes the form of a fractured narrative, it invites the very practice of deconstruction it often employs, allowing the appropriation of its methodology for use elsewhere, in the service of some other theory and against its own ideological shortcomings--its double-cross effectively crossed once more.

My extension of Foster's argument borrows its last claim from the argument advanced by Elizabeth Meese, in her study Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism. So too, it marks, with Meese, an ambivalence in the relation of feminism to postmodernism. It is this ambivalence which makes the feminist critic wary of poststructuralist theory, and which indeed

renders a writer such as Carter problematic. Meese observes that

> By denying that feminist criticism has a theory (or a theory that refuses to be a theory), most male critics presume that they can legitimately continue to survey male texts within the context of male versions of literature, philosophy, and history, and specifically within deconstruction, which itself claims to be a method or a practice of reading rather than a theory. . . . They are men speaking to men about men. In this respect post-structuralist criticism remains retrograde in its sexual politics, writing the denial of its desire for women, for feminism. (Meese 1986, 143)

This identification of the retrograde in poststructuralist theory, however, does not lead Meese to reject that theory out of hand; rather, it leads her to advocate its transformation through transgression. In a move that recalls Claudine Hermann's play on voler--to fly and to steal--she observes (for her feminist readers) that "Our essential 'disloyalty to civilization,' our willingness to steal and fly, constitute the source of our revolutionary potential" (Meese 1986, 147). The Derridean bricoleur finds his subversive program itself undone and transformed by the designs of a bricoleuse whose view includes the effects of gender. What, says Meese,

> does it matter how Derrida speaks of feminism? Are we not once again, now by this new master of deconstruction, simply condemned to another epoch of silence--one in which we cannot speak "woman" but cannot not speak, and cannot join with other feminists while we must? Still, there is something in Derrida's caution [against "reactive feminism"] worth translating to other purposes--a call for the possibilities of openings rather than the risks of foreclosures. We will need to speak of *** in place of "woman"--that

> something the meaning or non-meaning of which our phallocentric structure will not allow us to say. And this unimaginable, imaginary something, this understanding of ***, this <<feminism(s)>>--the effects of freedom/utopia itself--are not so different from what appears to be deconstruction's utopic projection as it asserts its motion toward the unthinkable, unknowable point(s) beyond the system it deconstructs. In this sense, can we not say that both Derridean deconstruction and feminism share a utopic and political motive to "go beyond" and to move toward the expression of the inexpressible, the unknowable?
>
> (Meese 1986, 87)

Worth translating to other purposes, in the interests of openings: in effect, then, the deployment of a deconstructive methodology in pursuit of some re-placed, untraceable beyond. For Meese, this translation offers a wonderously treacherous challenge to the prescripts of phallocentric theories:

> By substituting diversity and displacement for the Father's Law of the One and the Same, we can guard against exclusion and create the openings needed for the multivocality required if theory is to be made by and to permit the expression of all women. . . . [To refuse the authority of the signified constitutes] the writer's double gesture of crossing the double-cross rather than exposing it with bravado, to deconstruct as one constructs. Feminism requires more than the narcissistic language game of criticism and challenges critical theory to discover and admit its own politics.
>
> (Meese 1986, 148)

Just as it is the danger of poststructuralism that its assault on the Father's Law will stop short of the issue of gender, and indeed become, with respect to gender, indistinguishable from that Law, so too it is the capacity--but never the constraint--of feminism to subvert and circumvent deconstructive legislation, to

pull poststructuralist methodology through its ideology and transport it elsewhere.[1]

* * * * *

My purpose, in tracing the contours of canonical postmodernity, and those of specific feminist interrogations of that canon, has been to establish a theoretical context in which to set the ideological and aesthetic confabulations that occur in Angela Carter's fictions, and also to identify the three genres--gothicism, romance, and what I designate a genre of representation--in which her concussive effects resound most strongly. And while it is possible that the pattern of conspiracy between feminism and a transformed postmodernity will, when subsequently retraced in Carter's tales, become indistinguishable from that of complicity with the discourse which feminism intends to subvert, I rather suspect that her fictions will offer a blatantly in-visible re-reading, a fabulous palimpsest in which the same cannot but give way to the new. Indeed, she manages to mix and confuse in glorious fashion

---

[1] The idea of an "elsewhere," suggested here and previously, comes from Teresa de Lauretis' essay, "The Technology of Gender," where it is used to identify the space left unrepresentable by hegemonic, phallocentric discourses. It is a concept to which I will return, again and again, in the course of my thesis. See de Lauretis 1987, 1-30.

Lyotard's grand et petit récits--a mixing of what Morris would call tall tales and white lies--with the effect that his and postmodernity's interdiction against grand narratives and their prescription of heroic action in service of some unnamed Name come together to explode. My eventual hope, then, in (re)reading her fictions, is to find in their imaginative life a subversive design which, all but hiding itself from view, achieves its effects--whatever they prove to be--against and in spite of the proscriptions of phallocentric law, and also of canonical postmodernity.

Chapter Two: Intoxication and Transgression

Writing of her artistic method, Angela Carter observes, in a piece entitled "Notes from the Front Line," that "Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts" (Carter 1983, 69). She follows this intentionally obvious and innocuous statement with a rather more provocative analogy, rhetorical Hyde to the preceding Jekyll: "I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode." I choose to trace, along the contours of this analogy, several species of possible relation: postmodern wine to pre-modern bottle, perhaps; or fabulous wine to the mythic containers of fable; or again, feminist wine to the bottles of an androcentric culture in which postmodernism is to an extent complicit. This last configuration, which takes feminism to be the demon liquor, is resonant with provocative possibilities, in that it brings to mind a subsequent set of terms--sobriety, cultivation, propriety; intoxication, decadence, impropriety--whose contradictions and oscillations continually signal transgression in Carter's mannered, unsettling fictions. For wine in service of the terrorist, and not the epicure or the bacchant,

becomes liquid of a different sort--fluid in its relation to expected meaning, and always flowing away from its intended destination, elsewhere than to the point of its expected consumption. Too, in exploding with its pressure bottles designed to contain it, this wine disrupts the established order of the cellar, the underground, the foundation of the androcentric imagination, thereby subverting not only the coherent identity of that space but also its relation in service to the appetite of its owner. Yet if feminist wine explodes through the bottles of postmodernism to shamble and then transform the cellar, or subconscious, of the androcentric imagination, what is the cost to feminism? Or, to recast this question in the terms of Carter's own analogy, should one cry over spilled wine?

In the case of Carter's fiction, the issue of this analogical reclamation rarely finds straightforward resolution, particularly as it frequently occurs in the ritualized settings of fable, where issues of gender and representation receive investigation within the rhetoric of an unsettling eroticism. Because her tales exhibit little in the way of an easy or programmatic feminism (which, at least in my view, makes their political value not more but rather less suspect), Carter becomes a volatile because unpredictable writer. The fabular capacity of her narratives, when joined to her baroque

prose and often elusive politics, can obscure the transformative potential of her texts, and lead one to wonder at the extent to which, despite her subversive intention, her affection for effect aligns her with the strategies of phallocentric representation. I intend, by looking at a number of the stories collected in Fireworks and Black Venus, and at episodes in two of her more recent novels, to initiate a partial and decentred investigation of these concerns, which will seek out the postmodern strategies in Carter's writing along with their transgression and transformation by (and of) feminism, and which, with luck, will find in Carter a crucial recognition of the treachery of the double-cross--that is, a realization that its inscription must cut both ways.

Carter's fictions offer their readers a virtual catalogue of postmodern narrative possibilities. They turn repeatedly on questions of historical connection, fable and the fabulous, reflexivity, identity and its representation, value, order, meaning, control, the production and prescription of truth, and so forth--so much so, in fact, that they often seem to be virtually paradigmatic of some essence of postmodernism. It is therefore worth exploring the postmodern features of Carter's texts not only to appreciate the stories themselves but also, and more importantly, to measure the

extent to which seemingly paradigmatic fictions subvert and cross through a genre that, by all accounts, distrusts the very concept of the paradigm.

Because the seemingly obverse concerns of fable and history stand out in Carter's tales, their intersections serve as a ground and a source for provocation. "The Bloody Chamber" (from the volume of the same name), "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter," "The Loves of Lady Purple" (from Fireworks), and "The Kiss" (from Black Venus) share the quasi-allegorical and paranormal details of the folk-tale genre; "Black Venus" engages with aspects of literary and cultural history at the uneasy matrix of the evidently factual and the manifestly fictive; The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman explores the representation and reification of desire; Nights at the Circus weaves a pattern of the utopic possiblities in the fabulous, the grotesque, and the carnivalesque; "Reflections" (from Fireworks) views questions of the self, its construction, and its colonization in and through the motif of the looking-glass. Writing of postmodernist narrative, Linda Hutcheon observes that

> What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past. . . . In other words, the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past "events" into present historical "facts." This is not

> a "dishonest refuge from truth" but an acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human constructs. (Hutcheon 1988, 89)

Certainly Carter, in her use of both history and fable, aims to test the cultural, political, and literary systems that manufacture the prescriptive discourse of Truth. Yet if in so doing she teaches us anything, it is to trust with caution everything we are taught--in effect, to reject lessons not as they can be learned but as they are conventionally represented and received.

Of her historically-derived fictions, the title story in Black Venus makes this lesson against lessons strikingly clear. In its exploration of the possibilities for invention present in the figure of Jeanne Duval, Baudelaire's mistress, Carter's story does more than simply renounce the canonical set of facts of the French poet's career. Instead, by attending to an alternate factuality, and by enmeshing it in a pattern of invention, Carter undermines the ideal of transcendent ahistory that attends on dominant notions of historical sequence, literary or otherwise. For the historical legacy, or rather lesson, of Baudelaire, the representative poet of the tortured imagination, is in Carter's version not a poetics of excess but rather "the veritable, the authentic, the true Baudelairean syphilis" (Carter 1986, 23), dispensed erotically rather than poetically, and conveyed not in narrative but rather by

the tropological Woman-as-Text. Disease becomes a form of cultural discourse that not only runs counter to the dominant version of imperialism (in which the colonial project brings spiritual and cultural enlightenment) but also, in strikingly postmodern fashion, finds its continual reinscription in the coital écriture of heterosexism. And so even as, in Carter's treatment of the historical mythology of Baudelaire, the genius or spirit of the text becomes confused with the workings of venereal disease, so too her concern for the effects of race and gender in the historical and sexual narratives leads us elsewhere, eliciting our reinterpretation of the simply postmodern just as it has of the conventionally historical. Veneral disease--the sign of contamination that appears only after sexual contact, erotic performance--becomes at once a figure not only for the dangers of (canonical) postmodernism, but also for the ways in which those dangers can themselves be undone, their double-cross crossed out, crossed over, crossed through.

Already, then, Carter's postmodern fictions ask to be read differently, with difference in mind. In this, they declare for themselves a poetics of transgression, the feminist tenets of which continually test their own limits along with those of the methodologies they suffuse. Attending to the features of postmodernism in

Carter's stories is straightforward work. To address the relation of these features to the explicitly feminist concerns of gender and genre, however, holds along with greater challenge greater reward. What follows, then, is an attempt in that direction, a reading toward elsewhere whose path follows signs of (and against) violence and representation.

Desecration/Consecration: Violence and the Sacred

> Pornography, like marriage and the fictions of romantic love, assists the process of false universalising. Its excesses belong to that timeless, locationless area outside history, outside geography, where fascist art is born. (Carter 1979, 12)

Leaving Jeanne Duval for a time, with the promise of return, I turn to consider "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter"--an act which, in the economy of repressed desire that structures the tale's imaginary land, is precisely what I am expected and even prescribed to do: that is, to consider female beauty, to control and extend its representation through the exercise of the voyeur's privilege, the voyeur's power. The story's world has as its ordering principles ritualized violence and malevolence; its initial--and initiatory--spectacle, "a nature morte . . . a celebration of a death," marks the limits of the population's shared imagination, and so registers not only the specific violence of execution but also the general violence of the static and inert, general violence that emerges time and again in sanctioned modes of representation (Carter 1988a, 19). For the celebration of death extends from a ritual association of death as an absolute term in the ontological narrative and the representation of Death (by virtue of its operation) as gendered male. And to

perpetuate, as the viewers do, this ritual association is to allow its phallic conflation of value and representation--whereby the cultural signs for the end of life confine, and define by opposition, the cultural signs, or representations, of life--to remain uncontested, static, and inert.

The political organization of the society extends, crudely and directly, from the law of the father: the resident patriarch, an executioner, exerts his power through an ethos of life-in-death, the icon and fetish of which is his daughter, predictable beauty to the public beast. The mask he wears stands in metonymic fashion for the absolute power he holds:

> [it] is made of supple, close-fitting leather dyed an absolute black and it conceals his hair and the upper part of his face entirely except for two narrow slits through which issue the twin regards of eyes as inexpressive as though they were part of the mask. This mask reveals only his blunt-lipped, dark-red mouth and the greyish flesh which surrounds it. Laid out in such an unnerving fashion, these portions of his meat in no way fulfil the expectations we derive from our common knowledge of faces. They have a quality of obscene rawness as if, in some fashion, the lower face had been flayed. He, the butcher, might be displaying himself, as if he were his own meat. (20)

As the power symbolized by the mask is perverse, so the mask itself is disturbing in its effects on identity:

> Through the years, the close-fitting substance of the mask has become so entirely assimilated to the actual structure of his face that the face itself now seems to possess a parti-coloured appearance, as if by nature dual; and this face no longer pertains to that which is human as if, when he first put on the mask, he blotted out his own, original face and so defaced himself for ever. Because the hood of office renders the

> executioner an object. He has become an object who punishes. He is an object of fear. He is the image of retribution. (20-21)

By the emblem of his power, the master is himself mastered. His imagination can only represent the Other, colonize its identity, and render it the object of his control; unable to do otherwise, he must represent himself out of self--in effect, as unselved, as the retributive Other in an economy of Otherness. His freedom in power is so total and so extreme that it undoes itself, imprisoning him. In keeping with the Sadeian libertine (at least as Carter, in The Sadeian Woman, constructs him), the executioner's "hieratic ritual" (Carter 1988a, 19) consists in "[t]he annihilation of the self and the resurrection of the body," a ritual in which "flesh is used instrumentally, to provoke . . . spasmodic visitations of dreadful pleasure"--always as a version of the "sacramental meal," and never as "the instrument of love" (Carter 1979, 150). It is the transgressive potential and ambivalent achievement of Carter's tale to reveal the double-cross inherent in the twofold discourse of commodity and fetish, to reveal the way the ideology that holds the two together can trap its agent in its own representative designs.

But provocation comes not only from the demystification effected by Carter's text; it also arises

from the strange relation of complicity in violent meaning to apparent non-significance. To elaborate: there exists a pronounced tension, at the level of narrative production, between, on the one hand, the representation and replication of gendered and racial stereotypes and, on the other, the inconsequent quality of the story's plot. Where the former rely on a purely hegemonic ideology of Truth for their power, the latter disrupts the capacity of meaning to constitute truth, and thereby disturbs the foundation of Truth's structure. While we receive an apparently uncritical representation of Gretchen as the pure, Teutonic ideal of femininity, juxtaposed to an undifferentiated, subhuman, Mongol mass of physical and spiritual decay, a virtual "museum of diseases" (Carter 1988a, 24)--in effect, what amounts to a neo-fascist celebration of the conventionally feminine at the expense of a crudely stereotypical orientalism--that representation occupies a disjunctive and mannered fable of power which offers as its conclusion an echo of an already obscure dream sequence. The narrative indecision, then, has as one of its effects to call into question the apparent certainty with which blatant and polarized stereotypes have been used. Yet while this textual indecision undermines the neo-fascist schema, because of its complicit or at least consequent position in relation to that schema, it can offer no alternative.

Confronted with such contradiction, we may nevertheless postulate an allegorical interpretation of Carter's fiction: that is, a vision of the intractable paths for feminist action within the entrenched context of a static poststructuralism which offers only the methods of deconstruction, and not the more revolutionary possibilities of destruction and reconstruction--possibilities essential to a feminist cross through the double-cross of violence and the sacred, for a feminist move, along the fissures of postmodernism, elsewhere.

The Bonds of Representation

> In the mythical text, . . . the hero must be male regardless of the gender of the character, because the obstacle, whatever its personification . . . , is morphologically female--and indeed, simply, the womb, the earth, the space of his movement. As he crosses the boundary and "penetrates" the other space, the mythical subject is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.
> (de Lauretis 1987, 43-44)

De Lauretis' observations expose the lie concealed by mythological Truth, and thereby undo the seductive capacity of the mythical paradigm. Carter's transgressive project finds reflection in these observations, to the extent that her fictions explore the

investment of cultural myths in the political economy of gender. Take, for example, "The Kiss." There, Carter imagines Samarkand, "an authentically fabulous city" (Carter 1986, 27), and reinvents in this location a mythic tale of Tamburlaine's wife and an architect not simply to test the possibilities of fable, but also, and more importantly, to draw attention to its reliance as a genre--an order of meaning--on ideologies of violence, property, propriety, and retribution. And because of this concern for generic ideologies, despite the narrator's claim to the contrary, Carter's fiction is not simply "a story in simple, geometric shapes and the bold colours of a child's box of crayons," in which phallocentric law sanctions violence against women in the event that they represent themselves against and in spite of its proscriptions (29). It is equally a tale that concludes with a move away from the certainty essential to the hegemonic discourse of the phallocentric dominant. For if "[a]fter she [runs] away from [her husband] perhaps she [who was but is no longer Tamburlaine's wife makes] her living in the market, . . . [selling] lilies there," then because her unconfirmed relocation marks a transgression of the monolithic order of representation, it allows her to subvert the economy she cannot escape, to confuse its simple geometry (29).

Jeanne Duval, Carter's Black Venus, cherishes a similarly ambiguous talent for the confusion of representation. Racially and sexually, she is always already represented. "The splendid continent to which her skin allied her had been excised from her memory. She had been deprived of history, she was the pure child of the colony. The colony--white, imperious--had fathered her" (Carter 1986, 17). And because of her colonization, she and Baudelaire compose a perfect union: "The greatest poet of alienation stumbled upon the perfect stranger; theirs was a match made in heaven" (18). A match made in heaven--and not in hell, as Baudelaire would have desired it, or for that matter as his aesthetic would haved predicted and demanded. It is a match, then, that runs counter to the representation of existence upon which his art depends. In problematic fashion, Jeanne Duval begins to subvert her oppression by means of that oppression itself; only as colonized can she undermine colonization, and thereby work toward economic and representational autonomy. "She was surprised to find out [after the poet's death] how much she was worth. . . . You could say that Jeanne had found herself; she had come down to earth, and, with the aid of her ivory cane, she walked perfectly well upon it" (22...23). Moreover, her power is, finally, not merely economic. She enjoys, in addition to reasonable wealth,

the ability to invent and inscribe the syphilitic Baudelaire, to represent him against and in spite of his identity as poet, to reclaim for herself an alternate narrative of the essence of his life and death.

Carter's fascination with such ambivalent and contradictory transgressions intensifies further in "The Loves of Lady Purple." For in inventing a tale in which a female puppet, long used in erotic and decadent dramas, gains life at the expense of her master's only to reinscribe her new life in the terms of her puppet's role, Carter makes good in fictional narrative de Lauretis' claim "that woman, as subject of desire or of signification, is unrepresentable; or, better, that in the phallic order of patriarchal culture and in its theory, woman is unrepresentable except as representation" (de Lauretis 1987, 20). The puppeteer, in his unironic parody of the dominant vision of female sexuality, becomes the prototypical male postmodernist, consecrating, through his manipulation of the puppet, a version of Baudrillard's vision of "the fatal reversibility of the . . . femininity-object (seduction)." The seductive illusion imparted in his incomprehensible narration makes absent life seem present by means of a blasphemous confidence trick that, because of its self-conscious falsity, leaves the secure truth of life itself open to question. Perhaps not surprisingly,

however, this challenge to the essential order of existence depends for its effect on the defense of the phallocentric order of representation:

> [the puppet Lady Purple] must have been the masterpiece of a long-dead, anonymous artisan and yet she was nothing but a curious structure until the Professor . . . touched her strings, for it was he who filled her with necromantic vigour. He transmitted to her an abundance of the life he himself seemed to possess so tenuously and, when she moved, she did not seem so much a cunningly simulated woman as a monstrous goddess, at once preposterous and magnificent, who transcended the notion she was dependent on his hands and appeared wholly real and yet entirely other. Her actions were not so much an imitation as a distillation and intensification of those of a born woman and so she could become the quintessence of eroticism, for no woman born would have dared to be so blatantly seductive. . . . In the iconography of the melodrama, Lady Purple stood for passion and all her movements were calculations in an angular geometry of sexuality. (Carter 1988a, 30...31)

Reality and otherness must coincide if "the quintessence of eroticism" is to greet the male voyeur. Yet even as "the iconography of the melodrama" works to constrain the puppet-woman in the bonds of representation, so too its features ensnare her master. For inscribed in the phallocentric rhetoric which conceives of women as Woman, and then as Whore, is the figure of the vampire--the limits of whose capacity, at least in this instance, exceed the limits of representational control. As the puppeteer kisses his creation, the Pygmalion myth takes on a life of its own.

> Her kiss emanated from the dark country where desire is objectified and lives. She gained entry into the world by a mysterious loophole in its metaphysics and, during

her kiss, she sucked his breath from his lungs so that her own bosom heaved with it.

So, unaided, she began her next performance with an apparent improvisation which was, in reality, only a variation upon a theme. She sank her teeth into his throat and drained him. (39)

This stands at best as a dubious form of empowerment and, as is shown by the narrative's conclusion, entails nothing of real agency--"she could not escape the tautological paradox in which she was trapped; had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette?" (40) Her escape becomes merely a return, whereby the postmodern double-cross prevents a move elsewhere. Likewise, Carter's feminist interrogation of the rhetoric of gender shows its complicit relation with the topos of contradiction, which itself aims to become the master narrative of postmodernism.

(De)Facing the Mirror

Briefly: in the mirror stage, the infant who has not yet mastered the upright posture and who is supported by either another person or some prosethtic device will, upon seeing herself in the mirror, "jubilantly assume" the upright position. She thus finds in the mirror image "already there," a mastery that she will actually learn only later. The jubilation, the enthusiasm, is tied to the temporal dialectic by which she appears <u>already</u> to be what she will <u>only later become</u>. (Gallop 1985, 78)

<u>No doubt this is the moment Alice ought to seize. Now is the time for her to come on stage herself. With her violet, violated eyes. Blue</u> and red. <u>Eyes that</u>

> recognize the right side, the wrong side, and the other side: the blur of deformation; the black or white of a loss of identity. Eyes always expecting appearances to alter, expecting that one will turn into the other, is already the other. . . . Duplicating, doubling, dividing: of sequences, images, utterances, "subjects." Representation by the other of the projects of the one. Which he/she brings to light by displacing them. Irreducible expropriation of desire occasioned by its impression in/on the other. Matrix and support of the possibility of its repetition and reproduction. Same, and other.
>
> (Irigaray 1985, 10...15-16)

We turn, at last, to the mirror--or at least to its idea--seeking, with little hope of success, Carter's reflection. Reflective glass recurs as a motif in her fiction--confronting, one recalls, the executioner, who "dare[d] not take off [his] mask in case, in a random looking-glass or, accidentally mirrored in a pool of standing water, he surprised his own authentic face" (Carter 1988a, 21), and likewise (but with different effect) confronting Baudelaire, "so far estranged from himself that, in the last months before the disease triumphed over him, when he was shown his reflection in a mirror, he bowed politely, as to a stranger" (Carter 1986, 22). So too, the "[m]irrors on all the walls" of the Marquis' castle (Carter 1981a, 14), which time and again reflect the narrator in "The Bloody Chamber" as the object of the gaze, as properly erotic, property-made-erotic, nevertheless figure forth an ambiguous power for the Other they reflect (a power that I will discuss in the subsequent chapter). This insistent use of the image

of (and in) the mirror functions, perhaps, as a metonym for postmodernity, and as a critique both of the narcissistic pleasure in self-reflexivity taken by that postmodernity and of its continual figuration of the feminist as spec(tac)ular Other in and to its theoretical debate. Evidence of these dual functions appears most convincingly in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, Nights at the Circus, and "Reflections."

In Hoffman, desire as an order and a function of representation shows itself time and again in the mirror's glass. The narration recounts "those tumultuous and kinetic times, the time of actualized desire," in which, in accordance with the Oedipal schema, the representative city--that perennial shrine of civilization--forsees its immanent destruction in the spectral contours of plague, a plague of the imagination: "This phantasmagoric redefinition of a city was constantly fluctuating for it was now the kingdom of the instantaneous . . . [and] no longer the conscious production of humanity; it had become the arbitrary realm of dream" (Carter 1982a, 11,18). And the machinations of the nominal villain, Hoffman, themselves serve a sort of mirror function, in that they offer in ambiguous fashion not only the reification of desire as threat but also the reflection of desire as fulfillment, the reflection of

the population's narcissistic desire in excess and even unto death:

> . . . we--that is, those of us who retained some notion of what was real and what was not--felt the vertigo of those teetering on the edge of a magic precipice. We found ourselves holding our breath almost in expectancy, as though we might stand on the threshold of a great event, transfixed in the portentous moment of waiting, although inwardly we were perturbed since this new, awesome, orchestration of time and space which surrounded us might be only the overture to something else, to some most profoundly audacious of all these assaults against the things we had always known.[2]
>
> (21-22)

This amounts to an assault on genre, and virtually epitomizes the transgressive function accorded to postmodernity by its advocates; it is not surprising, then, that the minister (in an act which, while recalling my Prelude, holds rather different significance) attempts to destroy every mirror in his ministry, and thereby to render useless the Mirror as a symbol of subversive reflexivity.

Yet while this attempt fails--as the Minister's encounter with Hoffman's ambassador confirms[3]--

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[2] The intertextual resonances here demonstrate the extent to which, at one level, Carter's novel epitomizes the character of postmodern narrative: its performance not only recalls its literary pretext, The Tales of Hoffman, but also travels the boundaries of fiction and opera, orchestrating a provocative association with Offenbach's version of the Tales in the reader's imagination.

[3] Ambassador: . . . I understand you have broken all the mirrors.
Minister: That was to stop them begetting images.
(The Ambassador produced a small mirror from his pocket and presented it to the Minister, so that

nevertheless Hoffman's reflexive incarnations of desire, so subversive to the political order of the ministry, rely in large measure on the phallocentric construction of heterosexuality as a genre, and so on a dominant, conventional, and repressive ideological lexicon. That is to say, if Hoffman's reified reflections of desire subvert authoritative meaning within the political economy of the ministry, they are at the same time complicit in the perpetuation of the dominant representational order. This complicity discloses itself most resoundingly in the sequence of images that comprise the sea-side peep-show--"the SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD IN THREE LIFELIKE DIMENSIONS" (42). Recollecting his initial encounter with this set of exhibits, the narrator Desiderio recounts the details of seven tableaux, whose titles run as follows: "I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE"; "THE ETERNAL VISTAS OF LOVE"; "THE MEETING PLACE OF LOVE AND HUNGER"; "EVERYONE KNOWS WHAT THE NIGHT IS FOR"; "TROPHY OF THE HUNTER IN THE FORESTS OF THE NIGHT"; "THE KEY TO THE CITY"; "PERPETUAL MOTION." Corresponding to these titles are--in sequence--a panoramic view of sub-tropical forest framed by "[t]he dark red and purple crenellations" of a vagina; two eyes; ice-cream figuring a woman's breasts; "a wax figure of the headless body of a mutilated woman . . . in a pool of

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he saw his own face . . .) (38).

painted blood"; the head of the preceeding figure; a phallic candle; a man and woman, copulating (44,45). As Desiderio learns from the proprietor of the exhibit, the evident purpose of the display "'is to demonstrate the difference between saying and showing. Signs speak. Pictures show'" (47). Significantly, however, entailed in this truth--or rather Truth--in the distinction of sign and image is the lie that informs the construction of each. For signs do not speak, just as pictures do not show; each rather reflects what is said or shown. And so, in the instance of the peep-show, the signs and the images do not speak and show to the desires of their viewers so much as they speak and show of those desires. Specifically, they reflect a phallocentric conception of violent eroticism which, by way of its construction of Woman, offers itself as the excessive or contaminated version of the heroic, chivalric narrative lived and recounted by Desiderio. Excessive, because it takes to uncontrollable extremes the objectification of the female, the fetishization of symbols, and the violence which surface in the chivalric narrative; contaminated, because it ruptures the premises of heroism to make explicit the collusion of these features, albeit to somewhat different effect. Yet to observe the similarities between Desiderio's chivalric narrative and the sado-erotic peep-show he views is not to suggest an

easy equation of the two, but rather to locate the reflection of their resemblance within the monocular eye, within the imaginary and the ideology of the phallic 'I'.

In this respect, the second of the seven exhibits proves to be the most significant.

> When I looked through the windows of the machine, all I could see were two eyes looking back at me. Each eye was a full three feet from end to end, complete with a lid and a tear duct, and was suspended in the air without any visible support. Like the pubic hair in the previous model, the lashes had been scrupulously set one by one in narrow hems of rosy wax but this time the craftsmen had achieved a disturbing degree of life-likeness which uncannily added to the synthetic quality of the image. The rounded whites were delicately veined with crimson to produce an effect like that of the extremely precious marble used in Italy during the late baroque period to make altars for the chapels of potentates and the irises were simple rings of deep brown bottle glass while in the pupils I could see, reflected in two discs of mirror, <u>my own eyes, very greatly magnified by the lenses of the machine</u>. Since my own pupils, in turn, reflected the false eyes before me while these reflections again reflected those reflections, I soon realized I was watching a model of eternal regression. (45; emphasis added)

This is the only tableau in the series that represents human anatomy in non-violent, unerotic fashion; moreover, it is the only one in which the distinction between viewing subject and viewed object dissolves. It marks the moment at which the ocular and oracular converge (and not simply in its premonition of the phallic image in Exhibit Six): for in this case, the gaze which sees and forsees its desires--that is, which sees those desires it has and will have reflected--finds those desires reflected in itself, symbolized in those machines that

afford the gaze its power, the eyes. And crucially, the "model of eternal regression" viewed (and also made possible) by Desiderio moves in not one but two directions, in and out, back and forth--moving its representative implications through space and also, presumably, through time. Indeed, this difficult and ambivalent relation of viewer and viewed might itself be seen, particularly as it bears on the other tableaux in the peep-show, as a version of the Lacanian mirror stage or, more properly, as a (re)vision of Gallop's view of the Lacanian mirror stage. Gallop writes that

> The mirror stage is a turning point. After it, the subject's relation to himself is always mediated through a totalizing image that has come from outside. For example, the mirror image becomes a totalizing ideal that organizes and orients the self. But since the "self" is necessarily a totalized, unified concept--a division between an inside and an outside--there is no "self" before the mirror stage. The mirror stage is thus a turning point, but between what and what? It is a turning point in the chronology of a self, but it is also the origin, the moment of constitution of that self. What therefore precedes it? (Gallop 1985, 79)

And without answering this most provocative question, she continues:

> In the mirror stage the formation of the first self is based on the first totalized image of the body: totalized rather than in bits and pieces. . . . The mirror stage would <u>seem to come after</u> "the body in bits and pieces" and organize them into a unified image. But actually, <u>that</u> violently unorganized <u>image only comes after</u> the mirror stage so as to <u>represent what came before</u>. What appears to precede the mirror stage is simply a projection or a reflection. There is nothing on the other side of the mirror. . . . The mirror stage is a decisive moment. Not only does the self issue from it, but so does "the body in bits and pieces." This moment is the source not only for what

> follows but also for what precedes. It produces the future through anticipation and the past through retroaction. And yet it is itself a moment of self-delusion, of captivation by an illusory image. Both future and past are thus rooted in an illusion. (79...80-81)

One may detect, in the peep-show episode, a radical premonition--an unforseen reflection "in bits and pieces"--of Gallop's reading of Lacan. For, in Desiderio's recollection, or reflection, of the exhibits in the peep-show, the 'I' views the anatomy of its desire reflected in the bits and pieces of its Other; reflected desire is both precedent and subsequent to the violent disorganization of the object of desire. This moment in the course of narration is, crucially, "the source not only for what follows but also for what precedes" precisely because it discovers the locus (not to mention the focus) of narration in the (self) reflection of desire. That is to say, at this point in Desiderio's account the fabric of narrative romance falls away to disclose, much in the fashion of a peep-show, its pattern reflected in the images and ideology of a violent phallocentrism. And because Desiderio's narrative implicitly reaches its mirror stage at the account and in the metaphor of the peep-show, its heroic aspiration is itself an instance and an anticipation "of captivation by an illusion," that illusion in which phallocentric desire and the Logos collude.

In its symbolic and literal functions the mirror offers yet greater provocation in the short story "Reflections," where it comes to reflect, and perhaps to constitute, the identities and capacities of postmodern fiction, and in so doing undermines Gallop's contention that "There is nothing on the other side of the mirror." Through the narrative 'I,' en-gendered male, we consider a series of fabulous signs that, when taken together, advance a system of representation that begins to approach the counter-representational: the shell; the palindromatic huntress Anna; the genderless/genderful knitter; the web of her knitting; and above all, reflecting all, the mirror itself. The expected representational value of these signs is displaced, moved elsewhere, taken through the looking glass. 'And significantly, the narrator, in his antagonistic fear of the palindromatic Anna and the ungenderable knitter, attributes to both the status of the female, thereby inscribing their difference from himself, and seeking power in the conventionally implied hierarchy of this difference.

But he cannot dominate them as easily as he might like. Indeed, the differential order meets more than its match in their transgressive project, which finds reflection in Irigaray's words: "Representation by the other of the projects of the one. Which he/she brings to

light by displacing them." On either side of the mirror, Anna, "[i]rreducible as stone, finite as a syllogism, . . . [is] always indistinguishable from herself whichever way she [goes]"--that is, never other than herself, unrepresentable as representation, and so beyond both the narrator's attempts to represent her as murderous and the moral value informing this representation (Carter 1988a, 92). And when the narrator is raped, his violation consists not simply in the act itself but, more deeply, in Anna's use of a representational identity to which, in his phallocentric view, she can have no access. Female volition finds its representation, in the masculine imagination, as violation; "atrocious physical and mental pain" visits the individual owner of that imagination not only because he is forced to become the victim, the Other and not the One, but also because his measures and definitions meet with subversion (96).

> How can anyone measure or define, in truth, what is kept behind the plane of projections? What goes on beyond those/its limits? Still proper ones. No doubt he can take pleasure in what is produced there, in the person presented or represented. But how can he go beyond that horizon? How can he desire if he can't fix his line of sight? If he can't take aim at the other side of the looking glass? (Irigaray 1985, 18)

Unable to fix his line of sight, Carter's narrator has recourse only to violence; unable to take aim at the other side of the looking glass, he likewise cannot take aim on the other side of the looking glass except through a reunion with his heretofore estranged identity as

murderer--in effect, by taking aim <u>against</u> the other side of the looking glass, with a view to destroy its possibility and thereby to reinstate the phallocentric order of representation.

> . . . I was arrogant; I was undefeated. Had I not killed her? Proud as a man, I once again advanced to meet my image in the mirror. Full of self-confidence, I held out my hands to embrace my self, my anti-self, my self not-self, my assassin, my death, the world's death. (Carter 1988a, 99)

At its conclusion, Carter's tale marks an ironic reinscription of the solipsistic system of the phallic 'I,' with its narcissistic, necrophilic love of its own suicidal tendency. Yet even as her text makes explicit the ideological hold of what de Lauretis has termed the technology of gender, it also reveals its inescapable complicity in the advance of that technology, its undesired narrative alliance with the narrative 'I'--a complicity and an alliance that arise from the ideology of representation inherent in language itself, and that cohabit uneasily with Carter's poetics of transgression. Yet, if problematic, nevertheless this complicitous contestation of the existing, or representative, ideology of representation assists Carter in inventing for herself a writing subject who is, like the one envisioned by de Lauretis, "at the same time inside <u>and</u> outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision" (de Lauretis 1987, 10).

Journey Without Maps

All the same, in Carter's fictions this doubled vision is often so extreme as to induce in the reader--recalling the vinous metaphor advanced by Carter herself--not only intoxication but delirium tremens. And the induction of an intellectual delirium in the reader is, for a feminist, a problematic practice at best. After all, to manipulate the intellect, whether to pleasurable or painful effect, is to colonize that intellect, to reinvent it according to one's ideological or artistic program, to represent the reader's interpretive identity--which for the feminist must have agency--as Other to itself.

Or so, at least, it would appear at first glance, and without attempting a second look. Yet from another point of view, delirium's double vision allows the fantastic and the actual to converge and oscillate, much as Carter's transgression with and of the postmodern allows the potential of the fabulous to conspire and conflict with the systems of the real, undermining hell-for-leather the insistently rigid edifice of gender. And in this, her fictions make elsewhere at once entirely possible and completely invisible, revealing no maps to describe its contours and its landscape, and so, if

inhibiting its discovery, likewise preventing its colonization. Or, to return at last to the issue of spilled wine, why shed tears, or seek its reclamation? The sparks of invention, after all, can transform it from liquid to flame, from consumed to consuming.

Chapter Three: Fictions of Terror: the Gothic Reborn

If to move from the conceptual designation, advanced in the previous chapter, of representation as a genre to the formal generic category of gothicism asks of my readers a rather jarring shift in perspective, nevertheless such shifts occur routinely (albeit more elegantly) in Carter's fiction. My move, then, will with luck function as both an emulation of and a tribute to the wilful spirit in my subject. And this wilfulness, which frequently entails a volatile and calculated unpredictability, serves Carter especially well in her fabulous reimagination of the gothic genre. For the effect of her gothic fictions depends, as I hope to show, on a doubled relation to the performative function of writing. Characteristically, the gothic genre requires, on the part of its author, an acute sense of the demands of narrative performance. To achieve its desired effect--that is, to make the impossible nevertheless possible, so much so as to inspire real terror--a work of gothic fiction depends on the performance of what amounts to a literary conjuring trick, in which the unbelievable becomes believed even while it hides the mechanics of its epistemological transformation. In the case of Carter's use of the gothic, however, this initial performative impulse is itself subject to a second performative impulse, a redirection of narrative energy from the

generically possible toward the heretofore generically impossible: Carter's version of the genre renders the consideration of difference (which is, after all, an important epistemological function of the uncanny) inescapably a consideration of gender and thereby finds, in telling fashion, the source of gothic fear in the One, and not the Other.

This shift in perspective depends for its effect on a transformative gothicism, a gothicism transgressing the limits of the genre from which it springs. By describing Carter's transversion of the gothic in this fashion, I intend to suggest that her approach is one which, even as it delights in the explosive potential inherent in the gothic genre, uses the very tactics of that genre against its own conventional vision, in order to reconstitute its horror and its power in feminist terms. In a sense, one may say that Carter works through in her stories Margot Northey's argument that gothic and grotesque literatures engender "a fresh flame of meaning," locating in images of death and decay the substance of new growth (Northey 1976, 131). In Carter's fictions, this substance takes the form of mythic artifacts--specifically, fairy-tales--enshrined in traditional culture. By excavating their latent potential for feminist argument, Carter undermines their emphatic antipathy to the female, and thereby effects by way of gothic and folkloristic tools a double-

cross of conventional gothic and folkloristic aims. No mere sleight-of-hand, this, but instead an act of narrative re-animation: through a leap of imagination Carter re-members the radical potential in the gothic tale by transforming its mythology and also its ideology. And in this, Carter's performance of the gothic mode reflects, in rather uncanny fashion, her performance of postmodernism.

I wish to consider five of Carter's tales--"The Bloody Chamber," "The Tiger's Bride," "The Lady of the House of Love," "Wolf-Alice" (all in The Bloody Chamber) and "The Fall River Axe Murders" (in Black Venus)--and also the presentation of Madame Schreck's decidedly gothic brothel in Nights at the Circus in terms of three broad categories of possible meaning for the gothic genre that, in conjunction with the fictions themselves, advance a rhetoric for what I have called Carter's transformative gothicism. With luck, these categories will offer more provocation than certainty with respect to the genre they characterize, enmeshing to form a web of meaning whose pattern, in keeping with the gothic, is both more and less than it seems.

Reflection/Refraction/Re-fiction

> Yet, how does one distinguish a mirror from a mirror image? The mirror itself, devoid of any content, cannot be perceived, but is simply that which

> structures the image, makes it possible. In the ethical imperative to be in the symbolic, the charge is to look into the mirror and see not the image but the mirror itself.
>
> (Gallop 1985, 62)

The collusion, in Carter's gothic fictions, of reflection and refraction in the interest of what I term re-fiction, involves revelation and dissimulation simultaneously. It allows one, particularly in the case of her reworked fairy tales, to see the features of source-tale and myth while transforming their significance. By intensifying the gothic qualities of her folkloristic sources, Carter calls attention to the generic and thematic ambiguities in her own fiction as well as to related problems in its pretexts. Her transformation of details of fairy-tale plots enables a concurrent shift in their ideological implications, and so challenges the conventional understanding of gender in the gothic and fairy-tale genres. And by effecting a change in textual identity fabular in its means and, I will argue, feminist in its aims, Carter begins to attend not only to the image in the mirror, but also to the mirror itself--that is, not only to representations produced by generic ideology, but also to the ideology (or ideologies) of genre.

Consider, for example, the emphasis on mirror-image in "The Bloody Chamber." Carter shows us Bluebeard's reflection time and time again, reinforcing her interest in narrative resemblance by way of the "Mirrors on all

the walls, in stately frames of contorted gold," which entice and capture the voyeuristic gaze by their very plentitude (Carter 1981a, 14). Yet, when viewed with eyes open for radical potential, abundant reflection entails the possibility of subversion. For while one mirror allows an "I" to emerge, several mirrors reflect manifold selves unselved, and thereby undermine monocular, monologic understanding. The object of the gaze--the heroine of the story--resists subjection by virtue of a refraction of self, a reconstitution of her subjectivity in multiple terms. Where initially she seems "reborn in [the Marquis'] unreflective eyes, reborn in unfamiliar shapes," by the tale's climax her shape, again familiar to her, is strange to him, and unexpected in its sudden power: "The puppet master, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, impotent at the last, [sees] his dolls break free of their strings, abandon the rituals he [has] ordained for them since time began and start to live for themselves; the king, aghast, witnesses the revolt of his pawns" (20,39). Just so, on the textual level the tale resists its resemblance to Perrault's story by refracting several crucial details in that source-tale, by reconstituting its initial subject in order to render its source not a thing of reverence but instead an object of humorous reduction and containment. Confronted by the heroine's rescuing mother, the Marquis stands "stock-

still, as if [that mother were] Medusa, the sword still raised over his head as in those clockwork tableaux of Bluebeard that you see in glass cases at fairs" (40). The archetypal story becomes merely a passing curiosity of the carnival. The process of refraction is thus most extreme at the climax of the narrative: the absent mother explodes with the force of "a wild thing" through gothic convention into presence, and carries with her a radical refraction of the archetypal hero (39). Significantly, the tale's nominal hero, the piano tuner, is blind to the loss of his conventional narrative reflection.

The effect is to refract and transform the gender relations of the source tale, and thereby to undermine its political and moral structures in favour of alternatives feminist in significance. Gallop writes of the mirror that it "does not simply return a neatly framed repetition, . . . [but rather] inverts the image, reverses the order," and then proceeds to ask, "What, then, is a return, what is the direction of a return, how does one direct a return if the order does not matter?" (Gallop 1985, 94) These questions bear provocatively on issues of literary as well as literal reflection in "The Bloody Chamber," particularly since both the phallocentric order within the story's narration and the pre-textual order that informs that narration, secure in

their significance at the outset, come by the tale's conclusion not to matter, or at least only to matter with respect to their subversion. By confusing the dominant Orders, then, Carter makes possible a breed of fiction in which order does not matter, in which the direction of return--toward the fairy-tale as source and the gothic as genre--becomes a direction for departure, subversion, and transformation.

If, as I am contending, Carter effects a radical subversion of readerly expectation--demanding that we view the mirror-image otherwise, as it were--the result is to force attention onto questions of difference at the matrix of gender and genre, questions of difference particularly resonant with respect to gothicism. Her challenge addresses not only the ritual progression of the fairy tale or of the cultural myth, but also the reading practice that responds to such progressions. While when, in "The Bloody Chamber," the narrator observes that "[t]he blade did not descend, the necklace did not sever, my head did not roll," our expectation is confirmed--for, just so, in Perrault's tale Bluebeard fails to kill his last wife--the cause of his failure quickly upsets our certain knowledge of the progress of the heroine's rescue (Carter 1981a, 39). Here, it is a matriarchal and not a patrilinear triumph, as the mother takes the place of the source tale's twin brothers. So

too, but to different effect, does Carter subvert our expectation in "The Fall River Axe Murders." Using the Lizzie Borden story, at once historical fact and cultural myth, she encourages our anticipation of Gothic violence by quoting at the outset the story's familiar refrain:

> Lizzie Borden with an axe
> Gave her father forty whacks
> When she saw what she had done
> She gave her mother forty one. (Carter 1986, 101)

Yet in reading Carter's account we encounter violence of a very different sort, namely that of our own frustrated expectation. Borden's violent act, the heretofore central (indeed, the only) event in the story, is in Carter's account an absent centre, informing the fiction with the possibility of its occurrence and with the fact of its deferral. The narrative's neglected event--this fabled whacking, first of father and then of mother--is paramount in the registration of the story's horror; without it, the tale's moral centre vanishes, leaving only an uncanny displacement of meaning that strikes home somewhere between a gothic and an existential metaphysic. It is the absence of anticipated horror that makes Carter's account so chilling. The world in the Borden house is animated solely by its deadness, entailing no gothic achievement, but only gothic possibility. Yet in this the narrative becomes paranormal to the gothic genre itself--that is, it contravenes the possibilities not only of Reality as it is conventionally constructed but

also of textual meaning as it is canonically prescribed, and thereby makes itself doubly strange, doubly horrific, doubly explosive. We are forced to read against the pattern of the cultural myth, and moreover against the pattern of our own expectation, with the result that we focus our attention not on the fabled, archetypal event of the pretextual nursery rhyme, but rather on the intersections of gender and tyranny that lie behind Borden's murderous act, that constitute the active, cultural violence to which twice forty blows signify reaction.

Exploring the Paranormal

> Hypervisibility: the terror of the all-too-visible, the voracity, the total promiscuity, the pure concupiscence of the gaze; the violence of a civilization without secrets.
>
> (Morris 1988, 193)

The classically gothic paradigm invites us to indulge in an illusion of an alternate reality, paranormal in nature. But in so doing, it unwittingly enables its deconstruction, for while it desires and seems to draw our attention away from reality, its implicit effect is to ask that we invert normal and paranormal situations, looking back toward our usual reality from a vantage in the Gothic illusion with an aim to see the fictions that contribute to that reality. As a result of this

unforseen, unwanted glance, the normal loses its status as an absolute function of existence to become instead a relative one, determined by interpretations and values and the exercise of political power. In her gothic tales, Carter exploits this countervaling impulse in the conventional gothic paradigm; where typical gothic fictions strive to return their readers to a normality transformed by virtue of the paranormal excursion, in the case of a tale like "The Tiger's Bride" tension and provocation arise from the intensification of the gothic illusion at the story's close. The story holds a pattern of gothic/romantic signification, which may be mapped by way of several quotations:

> My father lost me to The Beast at cards.
> (Carter 1981a, 51)

> The treacherous South, where you think there is no winter but forget you take it with you. (53)

> [The Beast] is a carnival figure made of papier mâche and crêpe hair; and yet he has the Devil's knack at cards. (53)

> [His] was a world in itself but a dead one, a burned-out planet. (57)

> 'Nothing human lives here,' said the valet. (59)

> A profound sense of strangeness slowly began to possess me. (63)

> The annihilating vehemence of his eyes, like twin suns. (64)

> I felt my breast ripped apart as if I suffered a marvellous wound. (64)

> Nursery fears made flesh and sinew; earliest and most archaic of fears, fear of devourment. (67)

Treachery--of people and of landscape--deadness, strangeness and the supernatural, violence, fear: all contribute to the conventional gothic paradigm. But this pattern is only partial; the larger pattern in Carter's tale, and so its deeper meaning, emerge from the issues of politics and gender that weave through the narrative. To lose a daughter at cards is not merely a gothic loss; it speaks of an understanding of women as possessions, to be exchanged with and against the motion of chance--an understanding that is in fact normal, and even central, to dominant cultural discourse. As the narrator asks, with rhetorical force, "had I not been allotted only the same kind of imitative life amongst men that the doll-maker had given [his doll]?" (63). Consequently, Carter's fiction, seeming to begin in purely gothic fashion, is in fact committed at its outset to show the real nature of women's constraint within the politics of gender, and in its development to undermine that politics by constructing an altered, seemingly paranormal, reality. By the story's close, this new reality effectively transplants the conventional order: the father's machinations win him a machine in place of a daughter; the heroine, with the aid of her tiger-mate, abandons "all the skins of a life in the world" for "a nascent patina of shining hairs . . . . beautiful fur" (67). There comes no release from the paranormal

illusion, now a paranormal reality: that illusion-made-real offers no resolution; its accommodation is uneasy; above all, it is ambiguous with regard to the empowerment of the heroine and the female principle she represents--after all, while her gothic freedom allows an escape from the conventional order that has oppressed her, it does not allow her to defeat that order, or to construct an order of her own. But the point that necessitates this ambiguity is an important one, in that it bears on the imaginary construction and ideological status of dominant reality: the gothic transformation at the tale's conclusion is no more implausible than is the male fiction of female possession and exchange with which the tale begins--and this climactic transformation is not at all unjust, and altogether more liberating.

Related to this issue of paranormality are questions of horror and terror. Stock conventions in the gothic paradigm, the horrific and terrific are nevertheless largely confined, at least in traditional gothic fictions, to the realm of the supernatural or the paranormal. Not so with Carter's tales: her fictions eschew this exclusive connection of paranormality and terror, pursuing instead a more complicated association of paranormal terror and the all too often normal or real--that is, phallocentric--terrorization of women. In effect, then, Carter undertakes to examine the relation

of fear (itself a key manifestation of gothicism) to issues of gender and genre not simply by way of a departure from the known to the unknown or paranormal, but instead by way of a return to the normal, a review of the phallocentric norm that, occuring with difference in mind, effects disruption, subversion, and re-vision.

Specific instances in her fictions support the general claim that while many of these fictions contain much in the way of horror and terror, in them the horrific and terrific cannot be dismissed as merely supernatural. In "The Bloody Chamber," for example, the Marquis' affection for violence and mutilation is an extreme, but not a supernatural, manifestation of the desire to possess and master women. The gothic horror that his actions provoke comes not from the representation of unreal and impossible fantasy, but rather from that of real, possible tyranny. So too, in "The Tiger's Bride"--a narrative less dependent than "The Bloody Chamber" on horrific action and terrific discovery--the horrific moment involves an experience of tyranny: for the heroine (and also for the reader) the story's horror depends not so much on the supernatural prospect of marriage to a man-tiger as on the real danger of treatment as currency within the dominant cultural and economic discourse. In this instance, the move from natural to supernatural amounts to a disruption of the

culturally-determined opposition of culture and nature, by means of an impossible third term--the supernatural--and so to an escape, though a vexed one, from the strictures of the heterosexist contract.

This exploration of the paranormal and the normal as sources of fear for women occurs with more negative, but no less provocative, implications in both "The Lady of the House of Love" and the Madame Schreck episode in Nights at the Circus. In the former, Carter locates obvious gothic horror in the figure of the vampire, that most gothic of monster-types. Much is made of the vampire's feasting habits, of her deadly seduction of unsuspecting youths, of "the impedimenta of her condition [that] squeak and gibber all around us" (Carter 1981a, 104). She exists in "the timeless Gothic eternity of the vampires, for whom all is as it has always been and will be, whose cards always fall in the same pattern" (97). Indeed, we are told that "[e]verything about this beautiful and ghastly lady is as it should be, queen of night, queen of terror--except her horrible reluctance for the role" (95). At this point a competing notion of horror is introduced, the horror which causes her horrible reluctance--namely, the inscribed horror of patriarchal inheritance. It is for the vampire a source of tyranny, condemned as she is by her "beastly forbears . . . to a perpetual repetition of their passions," and

also by her literary past to conform to a role devised by the masculinist imagination, to struggle under the weight of a predictable variation on the death/maiden theme--Death as the Maiden (103). Significantly, the violence and disorder that she effects, against her will, belong to the hero as well, going as he is to fight in the trenches, but his willingness to perpetuate destruction in the seeming defense of truth constitutes a defense of the law of the father, a defense of tyranny in the name of heroism, an intensification of horror far greater than that achieved by gothic convention. The effect is to blur those distinctions that separate conventional allegorical roles: the vampire woman is not only villain but also victim, and indeed is victimized by her villainy; the hero's imminent participation in the First World War brings to him sinister significance--our knowledge of the historical past exposes the horrific gap in meaning that divides his innocent, virtuous present from his violent, grotesque future. Even as the narrative seems to invite an equation of the gothic, the horrific, the paranormal, with the feminine, then, it does so only to undermine that equation by locating horror not in the gothic but rather in the actual, in the very real practice of war which extends from the masculine, or at least the patriarchal, imagination.

In the Madame Schreck episode, the cultural and political implications derive an added complexity from the economy that informs the brothel as a location and as a conceptual site for ideological contest. The notion that, in what I will call a phallocracy, Woman becomes the symbol of currency and women themselves become objects of economic exchange finds complication, to provocative effect, when situated in a gothic context. For in Madame Schreck's establishment, gothic types serve in spite of themselves as typological objects of phallic desire. "'Who worked for Madame Schreck, sir?'" Fevvers asks, and goes on to supply the following answer:

> 'Why, prodigies of nature, such as I. Dear old Fanny Four-Eyes; and the Sleeping Beauty; and the Wiltshire Wonder, who was not three foot high; and Albert/Albertina, who was bipartite, that is to say, half and half and neither of either; and the girl we called Cobwebs.' (Carter 1985, 59-60)

Certainly, these "prodigies of nature" contravene that ideal representation of femininity prescribed by phallocentric culture; yet despite the fact that the women constrained in Schreck's establishment exceed and explode conventions of femininity, they nevertheless subsist in the constraints of conventional, if perverse, heterosexism, fetishized as supremely Other because of their difference, imprisoned in convention by virtue of their unconventionality. Significantly, "'the men who came to Madame Schreck's were one and all quite remarkable for their ugliness; their faces suggested that

he who cast the human form in the first place did not have his mind on the job'" (61). Like the objects of their desire, then, they too stand as "prodigies of nature," prodigiously ugly; nevertheless, their access to the cultural power of the gaze, and the concommitant economic power accompanying that gaze, remains unquestioned by the Victorian society they inhabit. And of crucial importance to this instance of gothicism is that the location of terror resides with the One, and not the Other:

> 'Oh, it was easy work, all right, especially for me and the Beauty. But what I never could get used to was the sight of their eyes, for there was no terror in the house our customers did not bring with them.'(62)

Terror becomes a medium of exchange in its own right, and moreover a function of the conventionally normal rather than the gothically paranormal; the passage signals a shift in focus away from the terrific possibilities of the unreal toward the terrific actualities of the phallocratic, the all-too-real. Too, the passage recalls provocatively Morris' delineation of hypervisibility: for insofar as the gaze, in seeking its pleasure, does violence to its gendered objects, even this most secret--because fantastical--location in London's erotic subculture simply manifests in concrete fashion the predictably tyrannical strictures of a phallocentric system of representation, and so configures hidden or

secret knowledge as an extention, and not a violation, of open and sanctified belief.

The Imagination Reborn;
Or, Imagination from Beyond the Grave

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!--Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustruous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.
>
> (Shelley 1969, 57)

I cite the words of Shelley's Frankenstein here not in hopes of characterizing some aspect of Carter's gothic project, but rather with the aim of voicing (perhaps unjustly) the probable reaction of the conventional postmodern imagination to that project. This strategy, despite its evident and prejudicial manipulation, nevertheless points to a predictable tendency in hegemonic postmodernity, whereby the postmodern intellect recoils in horror from the textual excesses of its own construction.[4] And, certainly, were Carter's fiction to appear as a focus in discussions of the conventionally

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[4] I am thinking, here, especially of Baudrillard, who leads the way in this retreat.

postmodern, it would do so in terms that attributed its impulse, and so its insemination, solely to the tactics of postmodernity itself. But, as is by now quite clear, I wish to contest such probable, predictable claims: Carter's fictions are in fact nothing at all like Frankenstein's monster, save for the fact that they succeed in unsettling their audience. Setting the pretexts of the tyrannical imagination against those of its subversive, transformative counterpart, in order to observe their clash and, in several cases, to effect a rupture of the first by way of the second, Carter effects an expropriation of pieces from postmodern forms which, when reconfigured, lead away from and beyond the postmodern grave toward some entirely imaginary, entirely unimaginable elsewhere.

Carter dramatizes this struggle of imagination in several of her gothic tales; it is a contest reflecting a pattern of gender struggle, in which the male representatives of discursive and cultural power attempt to master the agents of female imagination, and meet instead with subversion, resistance, and defeat. In "The Bloody Chamber," for example, the convergence of the gothic and the imaginative occurs first in the titular chamber itself. If one proposes, when discussing gothic fiction generally, to read interior space as female space, figuring forth female sexuality, to do so in this

case depends on the crucial recognition that female space in the Marquis' castle has long been colonized by extremes of masculinist desire, and therefore stands rewritten in emphatically--grotesquely--masculinist terms. In exploring the significance of the marquis' chamber, the reader feels revulsion at least in part because that space stands as a shrine to the destructive, masculine imagination; its horrors constitute an extreme effect of the intersection of fear and violence in the patriarchal psyche. Within the confines of this space, the marquis reifies his extreme discourse of possession in profoundly grotesque terms: he demonstrates his real political and economic power, as well as his gothic impulse to tyranny, by first constituting his past wives as objects--as figural, female texts--and then by submitting them to radical, violent erasure--literally, mutilation--in order to reconstruct these texts in terms of the extreme fabulations of his imagination. Yet for all its previous strength, this imagination finds defeat in its eventual conflict with its female opponents. "[M]aternal telepathy" enables the rescue of the narrator, the fourth bride, by her mother; that imaginative telepathy, made concrete, achieves the death of the tyrant just as in the past it has defeated pirates and tigers and plagues (Carter 1981a, 40).

This resistant, retributive imagination of "The Bloody Chamber" has as its counterpart in "Wolf-Alice" an imagination transformative in its impulse. In hopes of healing her werewolf companion, the wolf-girl Alice

> leapt upon his bed to lick, without hesitation, without disgust, with a quick, tender gravity, the blood and dirt from his cheeks and forehead.
>
> The lucidity of the moonlight lit the mirror propped against the red wall; the rational glass, the master of the visible, impartially recorded the crooning girl.
>
> As she continued her ministrations, this glass, with infinite slowness, yielded to the reflexive strength of its own material construction. Little by little, there appeared within it, like the image on photographic paper that emerges, first, a formless web of tracery, the prey caught in its own fishing net, then in firmer yet still shadowed outline until at last as vivid as real life itself, as if brought into being by her soft, moist, gentle tongue, finally, the face of the Duke. (126)

This act of resurrection becomes, at the conceptual level, a retention of the paranormal; more importantly, it stands as an act of imaginative creativity which confounds and defeats even "the rational glass, the master of the visible." The Duke <u>reflects</u> nothing--and so has no self to understand--until Alice invents for him self-reflection. In so doing, she discovers the creative in the gothic; even as "[s]he inhabits the present tense, a fugue of the continuous, a world of sensual immediacy as without hope as it is without despair," her understanding is total, not divisive, and therefore emblematic of future as well as present hope (119). Her imaginative creativity depends for its

execution on the use of the tool of discourse for ends subversive of dominant codes of perception. In effect, she speaks in tongues to achieve an understanding incomprehensible to those representatives of social and political power who persecute her companion, and thereby demonstrates the radical power of the transformative gothic imagination.

The Gothic Imagination and Cultural Terrorism

All the same, if radical in its power, in its workings this imagination nevertheless offers frequently ambivalent implications. In considering Carter's fictions, I have emphasized their subversive and transformative effects, hoping that by doing so I would illuminate questions of tyranny, gender, and feminism. But at the same time, this emphasis often reveals the gaps it seeks to preclude, gaps that themselves design a vexing pattern of complicity. The questions left unanswered--or for that matter unaddressed--in the argument I have advanced are legion. Why, for example, does the narrator in "The Bloody Chamber" speak of shame at the end of her narrative? Why does the tiger's bride escape her father's order only to enter another established, albeit animalistic, order? Why, in "The Lady of the House of Love," does the rational ethos of

the bicycle and the trench conquer without any sustained struggle the gothic ethos of the urn and the catafalque? Why, in the same story, does lack of imagination bring heroism to the hero?--why, in effect, is there no room in the vampire's drama for improvisation? And how does one reconcile the subversive imagination with the murderous impulse in Lizzie Borden?

Certainly, neither the fictions themselves nor the interpretation I propose can offer straightforward answers to these issues, let alone to the larger question of female collusion in the advance of hegemonic discourse--a collusion that, for example, allows the young Marquesa in "The Bloody Chamber" to come to sexuality through violent texts, and that accounts for the "red mark" which signals her "shame" (41). But then, perhaps this failure is a good thing; perhaps to demand such answers is to misunderstand the kind of subversion Carter advocates. Just as she inscribes her fictions against the ideological significance of their gothic and folkloric sources, so she invites a reading practice which runs counter to the conventional reading strategy that has absolute resolution as its aim. Carter has written of the gothic tale that

> Its style tends to be ornate, unnatural--and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact. Its only humour is black humour. It retains a singular moral function--that of provoking unease. (Carter 1981b, 133).

Such a moral function contravenes the conventional aims of literary folk-tales like those of Perrault, and indeed undermines the very premise of order and stability on which conventional, patriarchal moral systems depend. While for the most part Carter's fictions offer disruptive provocation in place of utopic solution, her tactics of agitation are greatly productive in the subversion of conventional thought and discourse, and in the transformation of existing politics of gender. In referring to her fictions, she terms them "eldrich guerrillas" (Sage 1979, 87) and the phrase is a resonant one: by virtue of their double impulse to subvert and transform, her tales perform acts of cultural terrorism from beyond the pale of convention and continuity and the secure, acts of terrorism well suited to the possibilities of the gothic mode.

Chapter Four: Seducing the Heart, Tempting the Soul: the Romance Re-dressed

In denuding Lyotard's postmodernity of much of its costume, Meaghan Morris speaks of

> a weary sense of déjà-déjà-vu, a sinking feeling that the neo-expressivities, pastiches and quotations of the past few years are about to be absorbed, in the fullness of time, by a proliferation of Sublimities which can subsume all three while resolving the differences between them.
> A new Sublime: what a terrible prospect.
> (Morris 1988, 214)

The prospect of a new sublime discomfits the feminist reader precisely because of the attraction it holds for phallocentric postmodernity: in offering union in subsumption, it promises romance, and with it love and youth, for the postmodern. In fact, sublimity, one might argue, serves as a transcendental analogue for phallocentric sexuality, entailing as it does a pattern whose design consists in love of fear, fear in love (with itself), a narcissistic or voyeuristic access of feeling, a self-reflexive projection into the grand narrative of emotion. And, interestingly, this pattern of sublimity that entices theorists of the postmodern (Lyotard chief among them) finds its reflection in the genre of romance itself--a genre whose claim to sublimity is nevertheless routinely contested. What to make of this paradox? Perhaps an explanation lies with the conventional characterization of the romance as a feminine genre, and the resultant, reductive conflation of the prescripts of

gender and genre into a supposedly transparent, unideological instance of literary truth: romance as female, and therefore non-intellectual, non-theoretical. Yet even as the phallocentric dominant in literary criticism insists on constructing the textual Other in terms of the feminine, in order to distinguish that Other from the (sublime) province of the One (itself), at the same time it possesses a nearly fetishistic, and certainly romantic, passion for the Other of its own construction--in effect, for the image of itself represented other-wise. If, then, one may say that the postmodern sublime shares its shadow with the archetypal romance, one can also contend that the hold of the romance on both the writerly and readerly imaginations is, if ageless (ever young, ever sublime), also conveniently postmodern, and more specifically metafictive. That is to say, in its allure for writer and reader the romance as a genre more or less holds true to the conventions that define it: it is seductive; it is irresistible; it is insistently, tautologically, gloriously romantic. In its conventional form, the genre masks itself twice over: its various devices--the active hero, the passive heroine, the quest and its trials, the threat to union and the defeat of that threat--may be read as allegorical figures for an underlying ideological pattern; in turn, that pattern can often, when detected,

reveal the genre's great self-satisfaction, its passionate affection for itself, its narcissistic, self-reflexive love of its romantic identity. The generic One runs through its Other to find the One once more. To speak of the postmodern romance, then, not as a historical type but rather as a conceptual entity, is arguably redundant, for in its metafictive version the romance is nevertheless always already about, and governed by, itself, and so is always already metafictive, always already postmodern.

Understood in such terms, the romance as a genre offers much in the way of provocative material for study in light of the transgressive feminism which, I have argued, motivates Angela Carter's fictive project. And, not surprisingly, in her fictions the use made of conventions of romance complicates and frequently subverts the aim of the genre from which they arise, namely to celebrate union or to mourn its impossibility. In this, her appropriation of the design of romance resembles her reinvention of the gothic mode, and allows the cultural terrorist to attack the romantic mythology from which the dominant cultural narrative derives much of its capacity for seduction. Her use of the genre of romance reflects in fictive terms certain key observations made in Janice Radway's Reading the Romance. For in their romantic manifestation, Carter's fictions

work to reveal and to engage with the conflictual effects of the genre, described by Radway as follows:

> The conflicted discourse of romance suggests . . . that with respect to women at least, surface differences mask a more fundamental identity. By insisting so successfully on its superficial but nonetheless effective mimesis, the romance suggests to the reader that the heroine is as individual as she and that, like events in her own life, those in the heroine's are merely chance occurrences that develop because she happens to be in a certain place at a certain time. The heroine's happy union with the hero is presented, consequently, not as a functional necessity dictated by the needs of social and political institutions but as a combination of luck and individual choice. The reader is invited to see her own fate in the same light as a freely chosen course of her own making.
>
> However, even as the narrative conveys its overt message that all women are different and their destinies fundamentally open, the romance also reveals that such differences are illusory and short-lived because they are submerged or sacrificed inevitably to the demands of that necessary and always identical romantic ending. Paradoxically, the inexorability of the romance's mythic conclusion might be said to reproduce the "real," not because all women actually find perfect fulfillment in romantic love but because the conclusion's repeated overpowering of the heroine's individual difference by her enthusiastic assumption of an abstract, unvarying role parallels a situation that women find difficult to avoid in actuality. . . . while the act of romance reading is used by women as a means of partial protest against the role prescribed for them by culture, the discourse itself actively insists on the desirability, naturalness, and benefits of that role by portraying it not as the imposed necessity that it is but as a freely designed, personally controlled, individual choice. When the mythic ending of the romance undercuts the realism of its novelistic rendering of an individual woman's story, this literary form reaffirms its founding culture's belief that women are valuable not for their unique personal qualities but for their biological sameness and their ability to perform that essential role of maintaining and reconstituting others. (Radway 1984, 14-15)

Yet whereas Radway documents the actual reception of popular romantic fiction, Carter renders fabulous the

already incredible pattern of the archetypal romance, and so brings to the genre an explosive potential even as she connives in its perpetuation as an ambiguous term in the cultural narrative. This ambivalent quality is, as I have already observed, characteristic of Carter's fiction, and moreover crucial to its disruption of the prescriptions and proscriptions in the dominant, phallocentric discourse. And, with regard to postmodernity, this ambivalent treatment of the romance enables Carter to free that genre from its self-reflexive fixation, to take it away from the obsessive hold of postmodernity--in effect, to use a postmodern methodology against its mastering ideology in order to transport the romance elsewhere, breaking its postmodern union in the interests of feminism.

In the following chapter, I will defend these claims with reference to Carter's three most recent novels: The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman, The Passion of New Eve, and Nights at the Circus. I intend to explore Carter's employment of and deviation from conventional structures of romance in the crafting of these narratives; to consider the relation of romance as a genre to the representation of women and Woman; and to argue that the reinvention of a genre conventionally engendered as female enables Carter at once to transgress the accepted limits of the romantic paradigm and to use

its usual status as feminine narrative to construct a place from which to speak within, and more importantly through, doctrinal postmodernity--in effect, to achieve that transformation of the postmodern foreseen by Meaghan Morris in the Introduction to her collection, The Pirate's Fiancée.

To Look, With These Eyes of Desire: Romancing the Text

> . . . Ah, dear Juliet,
> Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe
> That unsubstantial Death is amorous,
> And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
> Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
> (Romeo and Juliet V iii 101-105)

Carter's The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman finds its thematic pattern in the conventional, if morbid, relation of death and desire. In the novel's second section, Desiderio, its narrator, encounters the emblematic--and misogynistic--incarnation of fatal desire as he enjoys for a second time the voyeuristic pleasure of the peep-show:

> Inside the fifth machine, all was rampant malignity. Deformed flowers thrust monstrous horned tusks and trumpets ending in blaring teeth through the crimson walls, rending them; the ravenous garden slavered over its prey and every brick was shown in the act of falling. Amid the violence of this transformation, the oblivion of the embrace went on. The awakened girl, in all her youthful loveliness, still clasped in the arms of a lover from whom all the flesh had fallen. He was a grinning skeleton. In one set of phalanges he carried a scythe and with the other pulled out and squeezed a ripe breast from the girl's bodice while his

> bony knees nudged apart her thighs. The emblem read: DEATH AND THE MAIDEN. (Carter 1982a, 60)

Metaphorically speaking, the skeletal drama marks Desiderio's life just as it has impressed and titillated his imagination: upon leaving the peep-show to walk the nearby beach he discovers, delivered up by the waves, the corpse of Mary Anne, his somnambulant lover of the previous night. "I crouched over the sea-gone wet doll in an attitude I knew to be a cruel parody of my own the previous night, my lips pressed to her mouth, and it came to me there was hardly any difference between what I did now and what I had done then, for her sleep had been a death" (61). Ricarda Schmidt, in "The Journey of the Subject in Angela Carter's Fiction," observes quite rightly that "[t]he emotional if not the factual truth of Desiderio's desire had been necrophily" (Schmidt 1989, 57). Her subsequent observation, that "[i]n showing necrophily at the bottom of this male fantasy about making love to a virgin and the attraction of a sleeping woman, Carter reveals a sordid aspect of desire which is usually hidden under the beautiful roses of Sleeping Beauty," is less convincing--not least because in her distaste for the sordid Schmidt overlooks Carter's evident attraction to sordid desire, and moreover because her analysis of the episode fails to account for the crucial effects of gender. The episode, at least in my view, is paradigmatic of the novel itself not because, as

Schmidt would claim, it demonstrates the danger of excessive desire, but rather because in its conjunction with the peep-show's tableau it links specifically male desire and objectification--objectification, that is, unto death--and so renders desire an absolute term in the patriarchal narrative. In this configuration, because desire becomes not simply a detail but also an essential weapon of the romance, it meets with interrogation not merely as it stands in contrast to reason, but rather as it determines the political consequence of gender and of the genres of romance and heterosexism.

Key to this compounded understanding of desire in the novel is a recognition that Desiderio is essentially unreliable as a narrator. Schmidt takes for granted his veracity, even as she draws attention to the crucial allusion, in the novel's seventh section, to Swift's Houynhynms. Yet this allusion stands as the most explicit sign of narrative unreliability in the novel, in that it brings with it the necessary equation of Desiderio and Swift's Gulliver, whose patent folly grows increasingly pronounced during the course of Gulliver's Travels. While the centaurs' realm may be nebulous in its temporality, it is in no way nebulous in either its mythology or its ideology: the conjunction of classical mythology and literary reference results in a static rather than nebulous frame of reference whose contours

approximate those of fascism. And if "[t]he overt repression of femininity in the centaurs' society illuminates not only Swift's latent misogyny but the misogyny of puritanism in general" (Schmidt 1989, 59), Desiderio's ambivalent relation to this repression--"From the waist upwards, [Albertina] was passable, if ugly because not equine; but, from the waist down, vile" (Carter 1982a, 190)--renders him at least complicit in "the misogyny of puritanism in general." More importantly, Desiderio's admission of despicability, on the one hand, and his appropriation of Albertina's "pain and indignity" in rape (179), on the other, brings to light in him a form of desire which complements the sort he holds for the mythic Other-as-One, part human, part equestrian: namely, a desire for the role of the hero in retrospect, wherein the recollection of sensitivity conceals the political import of gender in the voyeuristic observation of rape.

Desiderio's power as raconteur, one which is connected intimately to the patriarchal discourse of heroism, is both cause and effect of his apparent narrative credibility. And this, for him, is the beauty of retrospective narration: it allows him to render his desire as a reader of events, his desire in relation to those events, indisputably true of the events themselves-

-in effect, to render manifestly fabulous events historical. Schmidt observes of his name that

> As the object of desire he undergoes continuous transformation, his name and appearance change according to the conditions he finds himself in, that is, according to other people's desire for him. But he is also to become the subject of desire. His name Desiderio is the Italian word for wish, longing, desire; that is, it is the active form, not the passive one which the somnambulist Mary Anne gives as a translation of his name, calling him 'the desired one'. (Schmidt 1989, 57)

Yet Schmidt fails to account for the considerable irony of this name with respect to Desiderio's function as narrator rather than as protagonist. For if in the events as he reports them he is as much an object as an agent of desire, nevertheless his account of those events contains several unsettling mythologies evidently desired in support of his picaresque romance--among them, those of the noble savage, the cannibalistic primitive, and the mythic demi-god. The effect is to perpetuate a series of oppressive and reductive conventions in the service of the romantic quest and its phallocentric ideology, at the expense of those Others who are enmeshed in the dominant discourse that denies them the powers of agency and representation.

In its implications, this reading of Desiderio's narrative suggests a view of the predictably masculinist passion for both the Logos and the narrative phallus, the 'I,' as intrinsic to the broader design of the romance. Desiderio's increasingly obsessive struggle with Hoffman

occurs for and against the Symbolic, and has as its symbol, its token, its textual body, Hoffman's daughter Albertina--female property eminently proper to the romance as a genre. Their conflict is one between romance and anti-romance, in which the en-gendered Other becomes the ground as well as the victim. Crucially, "the time of actualized desire" initiated by Hoffman stands not only beyond the confines of expected reason, but also outside the dictates of conventional or apparent narrative design (Carter 1982a, 11). Giving no comprehensible script for the events which occur in his name, Hoffman authors a text which reveals no coherent textuality. Desiderio's narrative, then, becomes an attempt to correct this lack in narrative coherence; in the text's final section, his remembered disappointment at the discovery of the "clanking, dull, stage machinery" propelling Hoffman's marvelous fabulations reveals and confirms his failure to approximate this hidden textual apparatus (201). Desiderio's desire as a writer is always to achieve the pattern of consummated romance and, in the event that this pattern fails to emerge, then to wrench its resistant contours into those of existential tragedy.

> The shrug is my gesture. The sneer is my expression. If she was air and fire, I was earth and water, that residue of motionless, inert matter that cannot, by its very nature, become irradiated and may not aspire, even if it tries. I am the check, the impulse of restraint. So I effectively evolved into a politician, did I not?

> I, an old hero, a crumbling statue in an abandoned square. (221)

The novel's final line--"Unbidden, she comes"--with its presumed reference to Albertina's perpetual presence in Desiderio's dreams, offers an ambiguous solace for the feminist reader, in that it allows the object of desire to master the desiring subject; nevertheless, with its conflated suggestions of romantic poetry and postmodernity's ever-absent presence, Woman, the line confirms in Carter an aim to provoke, and not to comfort.

(De)En-gendering the Romance

> The conviction that women ought to live for love remains implicit in the idea of the femme fatale, despite the continual evidence of the behaviour of the femme fatale herself that this is not so. But the main contradiction inherent in the femme fatale is that, though she seems to live for love and often lives by it, she is, in fact, quite incapable of it. Or so they say. (Carter 1982, 120)

> How can I say it? That we are women from the start. That we don't have to be turned into women by them, labeled by them, made holy and profaned by them. That that has always already happened, without their efforts. And that their history, their stories, constitute the locus of our displacement. It's not that we have a territory of our own; but their fatherland, family, home, discourse, imprison us in enclosed spaces where we cannot keep on moving, living, as ourselves. Their properties are our exile. Their enclosures, the death of our love. Their words, the gag upon our lips. (Irigaray 1985, 212)

> For, to the extent that all fiction is a cutting up of the maternal tongue, is written in "foreign languages," might not literature, at least historically, have been one of men's few socialized responses to the unbearable mother's tongue? . . . Could it possibly be that the

> new philosophically valorized "neuter anonymity" of the text or world--a valorization of singularities beyond sexual difference--is but a new attempt to escape the rising voices of women? . . . And perhaps most important, is that which comes before or after the human subject of the same "substance" for the woman writer as for the male writer? (Jardine 1985, 117)

Jardine's concerns may find their reflection in the configuration below, one that can serve as a bridge between her critical project and its fictive counterpart in Carter's The Passion of New Eve: Interdiction: against interrogation of the dominant. Interruption: of dominance. Interrogation: rising voices. Insurrection: to what effect? This concluding sense of doubt, of provocation without solution, is consistent in the writing of both authors, and points to a desire in each to resist conclusion as a fixed requirement of their respective genres. Moreover, Jardine's suspicion of "a valorization of singularities beyond sexual difference" has as its counterpart Carter's ambivalent treatment of androgyny in her text. Indeed, Carter's reluctance to give way to the theoretical allure of the androgyne represents yet another challenge to the hold of the romance, for the attraction of androgyny is essentially romantic in nature, resembling the transcendental sublime in its promise to resolve sexual difference in a union of singularities.

If in The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman gender remains implicit in its significance, in The Passion of New Eve it serves as the thematic and philosophical focus in overt and even outrageous fashion. Yet Carter's extravagant and fabulous manipulations of the possibilities of gender find their grounding in the actual, in the outrageous mystifications of the feminine that occur in a phallocentric culture. As Evelyn, the Old Adam, the narrator enjoys voyeuristically the abnegation and suffering of the screen idol Tristessa, recorded in film; in his relationship with Leilah, the violence of the gaze finds amplification in physical and emotional brutality. Indeed, if his celebration of the phallocentric constructs of Virgin and Whore seems less violent than his unwilling transformation into the New Eve, it does so only by virtue of its numbing familiarity. Significantly, in this case celebratory objectification and transformative surgery are virtually identical in their effects: "Let the punishment fit the crime, whatever it had been. They had turned me into the Playboy center fold. I was the object of all the unfocused desires that had ever existed in my own head. I had become my own masturbatory fantasy" (Carter 1982c, 75).

But the Mother figure is herself a troubling agent of justice; representing as she does a conflation of

matriarchal and patriarchal mythologies of Woman, in exercising her power she gives renewed force to a dominant myth of the phallocentric culture whose symbol she excises, that of the castrating female. The grand theatre with which she conducts her various rituals inevitably lends them a parodic quality, and thereby contributes to the ambivalence with which Carter portrays the matriarch's emphatic, concrete, essentialist symbology. Indeed, the occurrences in Beulah do much to emphasize Carter's distrust of the symbolic order on which, ironically enough, much of her fiction depends. Yet her distrust is not simply of symbols themselves, but rather of the ideologies and political technologies that have produced them. As the by-now-old New Eve observes,

> Our external symbols must always express the life within us with absolute precision; how could they do otherwise, since that life has generated them? Therefore we must not blame our poor symbols if they take forms that seem trivial to us, or absurd, for the symbols themselves have no control over their own fleshly manifestations, however paltry they may be; the nature of our life alone has determined their forms.
>
> A critique of these symbols is a critique of our lives. (6)

The transsexualization of Evelyn/Eve, then, serves a twofold purpose: to illustrate the en-gendered and generic distance between Woman-as-Symbol and women themselves, and at the same time to investigate the complicity of the latter group in the construction of the former mythology.

This double project receives its most interesting reflection first in Eve's anti-romantic captivity by Zero and then in her romantic liaison with the transvestite Tristessa. The first of these, at first reading, borders on the ludicrous: Zero, one-legged, one-eyed, a hobbling, priapic centaur, seems to be little more than a parodic conflation of Nietzsche, de Sade, and someone like Robinson Jeffers. But regardless of the comedy of his initial presentation, Zero's threat approximates that of the postmodern romance, for in spite of his debt to deceased philosophers, libertines, and poets, he has an insurmountable, monocular fixation with himself, a self-reflexive narcissism that desires virility only in order to engender a redundant patrilineage. And this narcissism--the narcissism of postmodern romance--has as its pretext the New Eve's past self:

> And more than my body, some other yet equally essential part of my being was ravaged by him for, when he mounted me with his single eye blazing like the mouth of an automatic, his little body imperfectly stripped, I felt myself to be, not myself but he; and the experience of this crucial lack of self, which always brought with it a shock of introspection, forced me to know myself as a former violator at the moment of my own violation. (102)

The "crucial lack of self" felt by the New Eve may be seen by extension to indicate a distrust, on Carter's part, of the postmodern romance as it reflects the experience of subjects en-gendered female; for in the episode, Eve, already Other to Zero's One, is forçed to

become "not myself but he"--that is, not-Other, and so neither.

Even before Eve's brief liaison with Tristessa, then, the reader is predisposed to distrust the designs of heterosexist romance. For while the misogynist poet represents the phallic One of dominant discourse, his very name exposes him to be not-One, to be nothing. His missing leg looms large, here: One minus one . . . they all fall down. By comparison, the transvestite Tristessa seems a nearly ideal lover. Certainly, Eve's description of their lovemaking evokes transcendent thoughts of an erotic sublime:

> Alone, quite alone, in the heart of that gigantic metaphor for sterility, where our child was conceived on the star-spangled banner, yet we peopled this immemorial loneliness with all we had been, or might be, or had dreamed of being, or had thought we were--every modulation of the selves we now projected upon each other's flesh, selves--aspects of being, ideas--that seemed, during our embraces, to be the very essence of our selves; the concentrated essence of being, as if, out of these fathomless kisses and our interpenetrating, undifferentiated sex, we had made the great Platonic hermaphrodite together, the whole and perfect being to which he, with an absurd and touching heroism, had, in his own single self, aspired; we brought into being the being who stops time in the self-created eternity of lovers. (148)

But why, in a novel where sex does so much harm, does it suddenly become a metaphysical nectar? Why does a man who has done what men, the novel tells us, have always done--that is, construct Woman for his own ends--play the hero's role? Why, in a novel that has derided bad Hollywood and its mythologies, does cinematographic

excess occur at the point of romantic union? And why, if "[t]he erotic clock halts all clocks" (148), is the hero shot within hours?[5] The answer to these questions, I suspect, lies in the remarkable sense of nostalgia that suffuses the passage in question--"had been," "might be," "had dreamed of being," "thought we were," "that seemed," "as if," "touching": phrases that evoke not gain but loss. For precisely because this short-lived love with Tristessa represents remembered passion and fulfillment, it stands as the continual temptation of the New Eve to fall or lapse into the conventional designs of phallocentric culture, in which the genre of romance plays a crucial role. Through this episode, then, the text reveals the danger inherent in both the utopic impulse of the romance genre and the transcendental symbology of hermaphroditism. As Eve's climactic journey through the womb-like caves suggests, while the generic effects of (phallocentric) time need deconstruction and reinvention, this visionary project cannot occur without time itself, "in the self-created eternity of lovers." And in using time against itself, in beginning at her conclusions, Eve makes possible a new, as yet unknown genre with which to replace the

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[5] In a strong irony, it is the new breed of patriarchs, the young fundamentalist warriors, who rescue Eve from the romantic fate to which patriarchy would consign her, if it could; and their rescuing action is itself a function of a romantic, chivalric code.

temporal, phallic romance. Moving--to recall Irigaray--and living as herself; advancing toward birth even as dead memories haunt her.

Adoration/Fabulation: On the Wings of . . .

> Flying is woman's gesture--flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. It's no accident that voler has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense. It's no accident: women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds. They go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down. (Cixous 1976, 887)

Following Cixous, one may observe that Fevvers, the heroine of Carter's Nights at the Circus, is in fact not at all an emblem of the New Woman, but instead an embodiment of what women have always already been and done, their gesture made flesh. Her novelty rests with her insistence in performing publicly this eternal gesture--she flies in the face of rational possibility, and steals from phallocentric symbology; her manifest, glorious otherness makes mockery of the phallic One, with all its upright gravity. Above all, she flies away with the generic substance of the romance," . . . disorienting

it, . . . dislocating things and values, . . . and turning propriety upside down."

Proper to a woman with wings, after all, is a place in the realm of the grotesque and freakish, to be consumed by those possessors of excessive imagination or inadequate restraint. And, as we learn in reading Fevvers' past history, she has indeed occupied for a time that place made proper to her by the phallocentric society in which she lives, fixed as nearly whore in the virgin/whore dichotomy essential to dominant thought about women in Victorian (and not only Victorian) society. In her first habitation, at Nelson's brothel, she receives, not a sexual initiation, as one might expect, but rather her original instruction in the politics of gender. "[F]or seven long years," she tells the reporter Walser,

> . . . I was nought but the painted, gilded sign of love, [Cupid], and you might say, that so it was I served my apprenticeship in being looked at--at being the object of the eye of the beholder. . . . I existed only as an object in men's eyes after the night-time knocking on the door began. Such was my apprenticeship for life, since is it not to the mercies of the eyes of others that we commit ourselves on our voyage through the world?
> (Carter 1985, 23...39)

Playing first Cupid and then the Winged Victory, she is equipped from the outset to attract the gaze of the voyeur; at Madame Schreck's, her second place of employment, she must assume the role of the freak in order to offer sexual allure along with physical

impossibility. This leads in turn to her sale to Mr. Rosencreutz, at which point in her history the threads of gender and romance converge--not romance in its usual sense, but rather as it bears on the narrative of mysticism. Rosencreutz's mythology requires for its ecstasy simultaneous sexual union and death; Fevvers, procured in order to forfeit virginity and life simultaneously, stands unwittingly as a prospective player in, not a tableau vivant, but rather a tableau mort extending from the prescripts of the by now familiar death/maiden topos. Yet Fevvers proves capable of escape precisely because the sign of her particular difference, her ability to fly, allows her to elude, literally and figuratively, the implications of his rigid, phallic symbology. And significantly, her escape enables her to return to the community of women, headed by her companion Lizzie, who together have managed to extricate themselves from the bonds of the virgin/whore dichotomy.

It is in her capacity as a circus performer, however, that Fevvers begins in earnest to disrupt the several patterns of conventional romance. In so doing, she challenges a mythology far less obscure than the altered Rosiacrutianism of Rosencreutz: that of the Circus as at once the world in microcosm and the romantic aspiration of the young (male) imagination--that is, as at once what is and what always might be. And,

significantly, conventional allegories of both the Real and the Utopic save no place for any woman-subject, let alone one whose ontology is continually up in the air. As the star of Colonel Kearney's circus, she captivates the collective gaze that would otherwise seek to capture her, and thereby dislocates the voyeuristic power of her spectators. While Fevvers certainly thrives on reflection in the eyes of others, as Schmidt observes, "in contradistinction to the Lacanian constitution of the symbolic 'I', where the mirror image comes first and the symbolic 'I' follows from it, the miraculous Fevvers is the inventor of her own singularity for which she seeks acclaim" (Schmidt 1989, 72). As a result, she alters the political geometry of the specular relation, transforming it from a static, unidirectional move from viewing subject to viewed object into a participation in flux among multiple subjects. Her manifest otherness marks her as ex-centric--a figure defined by Hutcheon as "ineluctably identified with the center it desires but is denied"--but her fabulous novelty enables her to reinvent that role: by virtue of her performances, she is ineluctably identified with the center, her audience, which desires and is all but denied her (Hutcheon 1988, 60). Propriety--the proper relation of audience to (female) performer--turned upside down, indeed. And if Hutcheon's definition of the ex-centric is in some sense

integral to an understanding of canonical postmodernism, Fevver's reinvention of the ex-centric marks an initial stage in the feminist re-invention of the postmodern romance, whereby the ex-centric object becomes subject in order to steal back her otherness from the phallic One and to fly away with it elsewhere. While Fevvers is complicit in the specular system she seeks to transform, that complicity simply marks her interest in subversion, and not revolution; she is, to recall de Lauretis, a performing subject "at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision" (de Lauretis 1987, 10).

Even as the comic form of the novel requires romantic union, its revisionistic program demands the transformation of the conventional love plot, and specifically of its masculine player. As Fevvers, in speaking to Lizzie, says of Walser:

> '. . . think of his malleable look. As if a girl could mould him any way she wanted. Surely he'll have the decency to give himself to me, when we meet again, not expect the vice versa! Let him hand himself over into my safekeeping, and I will transform him. You said yourself he was unhatched, Lizzie; very well--I'll sit on him, I'll hatch him out, I'll make a new man of him. I'll make him into the New Man, in fact, fitting mate for the New Woman, and onward we'll march hand in hand into the New Century--' (Carter 1985, 281)

Yet to become the New Man, Walser must first become amnesiac, in order to forget the generic preconceptions of the masculine discourse to which he has subscribed.

As a result of his amnesia and his experience with the shaman's tribe, Walser no longer distrusts Fevvers' capacity for fabulous narration, because he is himself now a construct and an agent of fabulation, of the shamanic imagination. To direct and shape his potential as the New Man, Fevvers indeed sits on him, as she has foretold: in a fabulous (not to mention uproarious) conflation of avian incubation and human eroticism, she quite literally fucks him senseful--that is, full of (feminist) sense. "'[H]atched out of the shell of unknowing by a combination of a blow on the head and a sharp spasm of erotic ecstasy,'" he says, "'I shall have to start all over again'" (294).

This new beginning has as its context the pattern of a reinvented and potentially feminist romance, whose existence is confirmed by Fevver's grand confidence trick, revealed only at the novel's close. Her pleasure, in fooling Walser on the subject of her originality, manifests itself in the resounding laughter described as the novel ends:

> Her laughter spilled out of the window and made the tin ornaments on the tree outside the god-hut shake and tinkle. She laughed so loud that the baby in the Shaman's cousin's house heard her, waved its little fists in the air and laughed delightedly too. Although he did not understand the joke that convulsed the baby, the Shaman caught the infection and started to giggle. The bear panted sympathetically; he would have laughed if he could have. The Shaman's cousin caught Lizzie's eye and they both doubled up. Even the young mother in her peaceful bed of reindeerskins smiled in her sleep.

> Fevvers' laughter seeped through the gaps in the window-frames and cracks in the door-frames of all the houses in the village; the villagers stirred in their beds, chuckling at the enormous joke that invaded their dreams, of which they would remember nothing in the morning except the mirth it caused. She laughed, she laughed, she laughed.
>
> It seemed this laughter of the happy young woman rose up from the wilderness in a spiral and began to twist and shudder across Siberia. It tickled the sleeping sides of the inhabitants of the railhead at R.; it penetrated the counterpoint of the music in the Maestro's house; the members of the republic of free women experienced it as a refreshing breeze. The Colonel and the Escapee, snug in a smoking compartment on the way to Khabarovsk, caught the echoes and found abashed smiles creeping across their faces.
>
> The spiralling tornado of Fevvers' laughter began to twist and shudder across the entire globe, as if a spontaneous response to the giant comedy that endlessly unfolded beneath it, until everything that lived and breathed, everywhere, was laughing. Or so it seemed to the deceived husband, who found himself laughing too, even if he was not quite sure whether or not he might be the butt of the joke. Fevvers, sputtering to a stop at last, crouched above him, covering his face with kisses. (294-95)

Certainly, this seems entirely consistent with a view of the romance that posits universal, comic resolution as the aim of the genre. For the shared laughter might well be taken to signal just such a comic unity: "as if a spontaneous response to the giant comedy that endlessly unfolded beneath it . . . ." As if--but I, at least, choose not to hear the laughter so. Coherent comic unity coexists uneasily with the sort of subversive practice so cogent, at least in my view, to Carter's fictive project. Better to see this shared laughter in Bakhtinian terms, as a heteroglossic challenge offered to the hegemony of precisely such forms as the conventional

romance, and emerging out of the carnivalesque fabulations that lead up to its eruption. And again, better still to recall the argument of Cixous in "Laugh of the Medusa," in which laughter becomes a means by which to articulate the self and enact its representation in spite of and without regard for phallocentric prescripts and proscriptions; without regard, that is, for the mode of dominant symbology that predicates pleasure (in laughter, as in anything else) on clear understanding. For if the canonical, phallocentric romance requires as its object the singular Other unlike all others, in Walser's case his lover is not object, but emphatically subject, and moreover is hardly, as he has believed, "'the "only fully-feathered intacta in the history of the world"'" (294). Reliant on her fabulous qualities for economic independence and representational agency in spite of the prescripts of the phallocentric dominant, Fevvers is at once the pre-type and the archetype of the gesturing woman artist: after all, reminds Cixous, laughing, "Flying is woman's gesture--flying in language and making it fly."

* * * * *

Nevertheless, the subversive celebration of laughter and the liberating vision of flight envisioned by Carter in her most recent novel should not command attention at the expense of those more ambiguous visions of the construction of gender and genre found in many of her earlier fictions. Undeniably, the strategies of the aerialist and the thief, the pyrotechnist and the terrorist contribute to a provocative and decidedly unsettling rhetoric for the practice of fiction; it is of decisive importance to their potential as strategies, however, that they confuse as much as resolve the issues toward which they find direction, for to employ them in specific textual instances with the aim of foreclosing issues can easily jeopardize their broader theoretical and practical values as strategies. Still, this notion of ambivalent or conflicted potential in the strategies I identify in Carter's fiction has itself a provocative relation to the political aims of feminism(s), and bears significantly on the performance of a feminist postmodernism. At this point, then, I wish to turn toward some possible theoretical signs for the pattern and dynamic of this performance, as well as for its political impulse and insinuation.

Chapter Five: Post-script (after a fashion)

. . .

other woman What do you think about this postmodernism and feminism question? It seems to me that the periodization issue is moot. We know that women's relationship to history is so different, we are in such a different place that positing a one-to-one chronological correspondence is uninteresting to say the least.

woman-recorded I agree. It's more a question of a convergence of strategies, a kind of sharing of dissonance.

. . .

other woman The self-application of doubt. A fully problematized view of representation. Exploring whether it's even possible to escape the code.

woman-recorded But before we could begin to put this convergence of strategies to the test: first, the fear of the loss of identity and the loss of the name needs to be diffused; secondly, the nostalgia for unity needs to be radically deconstructed; and third, the more stubborn tendencies toward universality in all of this work need to be weeded out.

. . .

[silence]

other woman Wouldn't male intellectuals be upset if they knew the extent to which feminists read their texts--<u>how</u> they write--as symptoms of patriarchy, regardless of or perhaps in tension with, <u>what</u> they write?

woman-recorded Well yes, but not that our own texts are exempt from patriarchal logics . . .

other woman That's for sure . . .

woman-live We've been hearing this from women in France for over twenty years now, but I'm not sure it's been heard at all. Masculine criticism? It's masculine no matter who writes it . . .

. . .

other woman Irigaray: 'If we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same

history. Begin the same old stories all over again. Don't you think so? Listen: all around us, men and women sound just the same. The same discussions, the same arguments, the same scenes. The same attractions and separations. The same difficulties, the same impossibility of making connections. The same . . . Same . . . Always the same.'

woman-recorded And if that changed?

woman-live '[Then] all the history, all the stories would be there to retell differently; the future would be incalculable; the historical forces would and will change hands and change body--another thought which is yet unthinkable--will transform the functioning of all society.' But is it possible?

(Jardine 1988, 179-182)

* * * * *

We will need to speak of *** in place of "woman"--that something the meaning or non-meaning of which our phallocentric structure will not allow us to say.

(Meese 1986, 87)

* * * * *

EXTERIOR. STATION. DAY.
Station-master comes out of ticket-office.

STATION-MASTER: Here she comes!

LONG SHOT: Engine appearing round bend.

EXTERIOR. STATION. DAY.
Johnny tethers his horse.

ANNIE-BELLE: Why, Johnny, you've come to say goodbye after all!

CLOSE-UP: Johnny, wracked with emotion.

JOHNNY: He shan't have you. He'll never have you. Here's where you belong, with me. Out here.

GIOVANNI: Thus die, and die by me, and by my hand! Revenge is mine; honour doth love command!

ANNABELLA: Oh, brother, by your hand!

EXTERIOR. STATION. DAY.

ANNIE-BELLE: Don't shoot--think of the baby! Don't--

MINISTER'S SON: oh, my God--

Bang, bang, bang.

(Carter 1988b, 196-97)

* * * * *

Irreducible expropriation of desire occasioned by its impression in/on the other. . . . Same, and other.
(Irigaray 1985, 15-16)

* * * * *

Toward what, when all is said and done, does Carter the performer perform? For what ends, and against what views? And does the performance have a shadow? Is Carter's performance itself the shadow of some other, some earlier, some invisible gesture? Or is it the uncanny double of some all-too-visible gesture, imparting meanings better left unmeant? What are its codes of inscription, of transmission, of interpretation? Are they those of desire? Of fear? Of play, of love, death, deceit, violence, eroticism, blood, the unsaid . . . poetry? How then to read her words, see her dance, play her games, pay her costs, take her blows, do, when all is said and done, this interpretation thing that aims at all costs to resolve?

One way (and I certainly need one way, it's in the cards)--one way, I suppose, is to return to my point of departure, hoping to find in Foster and Meese some

composite, some template with which to fix and set and pin down and force into the open and so at last, when all is said and done, to comprehend what exactly Angela Carter is up to in all this.

Perhaps, when all is said and done, the shape of her fictions falls neatly from the connected signs of "poststructuralist postmodernism," as Foster construes it, and the double-cross recrossed by Meese. To test this possiblity, I must recollect myself, and see what I have seen, in hopes of enticing that as-yet elusive shape to fall into view. With respect to the claims of Foster's argument--that a radical postmodernism assumes "the death of man" as origin and centre of representation, that it is antihumanist, that it reveals representation as constitutive of reality--Carter's fictions entail much in the way of radical postmodernism. Her long and short tales not only assume "the death of man" but also imagine, in fabulous fashion, his resurrection more in the undead mode of Boris Karloff than in the divine one of Jesus Christ. Especially in their Gothic aspects, her tales reanimate this cultural corpse--the form of authority itself--in order to make explicit the cause of his death, to find the signs of disease in the authoritative body. Yet too this reanimation serves a cautionary function, much in the manner of the moral appended to those folk-tales that so

influence Carter herself: in effect, to beware the ability of dead Man to rise again, always already transformed, in support of some new, as-yet unhegemonic hegemony--witness the big boys of (canonical) postmodernity. And in this, Carter goes beyond the performance of Foster's radical postmodernism to recognize the treachery of its double-cross, the reflexive slash of its inscription, and so joins with Meese in the abundant danger of the double-cross recrossed, crossed out and crossed over.

The death of man at the site of the triple-cross, by virtual crucifixion--where have I seen that before? Perhaps, then, this narrative of crossings is not as new as it might seem, and more a re-reading in the sense that Barthes intends. The site of the triple-cross, after all, has its initial location at considerable distance from Carter's texts. This is neither to fault Carter for any lack of imagination (whatever her faults, insufficient imagination isn't among them), nor for that matter to discount the transgression inherent in her practice of the triple-cross. I merely wish to raise the issue of complicit inscription yet once more--scription, in Carter's case, which by virtue of its situation within, although at odds with, hegemonic discourse, becomes to some extent enmeshed in the cultural work of that discourse. Certainly, Carter's tales exhibit the

signs of diversity and displacement that, according to Meese, allow a disruption of "the Father's Law of the One and the Same," prevent the sort of exclusion attendant to hegemonic discourse, and open fissures through which multiple voices can resound. Yet while Carter clearly takes issue with the static and complacent "authority of the signified," as Meese terms it, and thereby crosses the double-cross, it is not so clear that, in so doing, she refuses completely all forms of that authority (Meese 1986, 148). The representation of social violence is repeatedly fetishized in Carter's fiction, even as the generic and engendered versions and effects of that violence are consistently undermined. Her aesthetic taste for baroque prose and decadent subjects extends from an ethic of excess, of terrorism, that indeed aims to blast through, in elegant, brillant fashion, "the Father's Law of the One and the Same." But while this ethical sensibility should not be confused with some raw appetite for destruction, nonetheless in exercising it Carter shows more interest in effect than consequence. That is to say that, as she herself has written of the fictive mode she emulates, her intention is "to provoke unease," to delegitimate the solution not only as a philosophical concept but also as a result of narration.

Behind this ethic of excess and rhetoric of unease stands a moral commitment to the transgressive potential of literal and symbolic representations of explicit sexuality. In the "Polemical Preface" that begins The Sadeian Woman, Carter offers a volatile theory for the work of a "moral pornographer":

> The moral pornographer would be an artist who uses pornographic material as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual licence for all the genders, and projects a model of the way such a world might work. A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes. His business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations of man and his kind. Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distorts our culture even as he entered the realms of true obscenity as he describes it. . . .
>
> Nothing exercises such power over the imagination as the nature of sexual relationships, and the pornographer has it in his power to become a terrorist of the imagination, a sexual guerilla whose purpose is to overturn our most basic notions of these relations, to reinstitute sexuality as a primary mode of being rather than a specialised area of vacation from being and to show that the everyday meetings in the marriage bed are parodies of their own pretensions, that the freest unions may contain the seeds of the worst exploitation. . . . The pornographer as terrorist may not think of himself as a friend of women; that may be the last thing on his mind. But he will always be our unconscious ally because he begins to approach some kind of emblematic truth . . .
>
> (Carter 1979, 19-20...21-22)

In her essay "Re-imagining the Fairy Tales: Angela Carter's Bloody Chambers," Patricia Duncker suggests that the first of the paragraphs quoted above (and presumbly the second as well) is "utter nonsense" (Duncker 1986, 230). I find it difficult to agree with her: Carter's

theory of the moral pornographer is volatile, extremely problematic for a feminist reader, productive of altogether too much unease, but not at all nonsense. Its menace comes from the stuff of sense itself--brutal meaning that affronts conventional notions of ideological responsibility, regardless of one's ideological stripe. Carter's conception of a moral pornography can perhaps be understood as a heterosexual version of Monique Wittig's theory-fiction, less elaborate in its execution and less successful in avoiding the taint of sexism. In Carter's fiction generally, her quite radical exploration of the structures of power underlying the generic codes of gender as they emerge in sexuality moves toward what Meese terms "the expression of the inexpressible, the unknowable," particularly as the texts themselves hinge on an ethics and an erotics of terror(ism); nonetheless, this hinge must bear the weight of strain, for as the cultural terrorist employs the tactics of postmodernity against its canonical manifestation, so too, when all is said and done, she terrorizes the spirit in feminism which would reject an ethics and erotics of terror.

But is all really ever said and done? And what then of the remainder, the residue, that left unsaid, the inexpressible, the unknowable? Perhaps they always already remain to be said, offering together the prospect of an ever-present future discourse whose resonance

entails the many voices of female pleasure and anger, doubt and desire. And in Carter's fiction, I suggest, we hear the premonition of such a discourse, a premonition that marks her inevitable break with canonical postmodernity, her move to cross through the image of complicity cast back at her by the postmodern mirror. This premonition is not so much apparent in the forms of her fiction as in the forms of unease it inspires. Even in their reinvention of conventional mythologies of representation, gothicism, and romance, Carter's narratives leave a great deal unsaid, registering meaning time and again by way of ambivalence. In the space of the unsaid waits the not-yet-said, its premonition communicating the wonder and terror of limitless possibility. The postmodern dominant is haunted by the spectre of its own indulgence because its performance is inescapably appropriative. Carter's performance, however--and, I would suggest, the performance of a feminist postmodernism--entails above all a practice of expropriation, a translocation of the heretofore private properties of canonical postmodernity elsewhere, in anticipation of inexpressible expression, unknowable knowledge, public imagination.

At this point, I wish to recollect the excerpts from Jardine's "Feminist Questions <u>d'après gynesis</u>" and Carter's "'Tis Pity she's a Whore." It seems to me, in

reading both texts, that this expropriative desire functions crucially in the registration of meaning. Jardine expropriates the utterance of the big boys of poststructuralism in the interests of public performance.[6] So too, Carter's tale expropriates, more emphatically and outrageously than any of her earlier fictions, the range of postmodern narrative tricks, in order to dramatize feminist questions about gender and its representation, all the while encouraging the prospect of a subsequent expropriation by a much more public medium: film. In provocative, complementary fashion, these texts offer performances of high culture that expropriate its canonical design for the service of pleasure, for the satisfaction of some other desire, figured otherwise, gratified elsewhere. And as the two texts resonate with the possibility of the inexpressible and more importantly its performance, when set together, in action and in tension, they perform again the effects of their intention, their invention. What follows is a move toward that second performance.

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[6] Quite literally. "Feminist Questions d'après gynesis was performed twelve times, from September 1985 to March 1988, and at least once subsequently, in late 1988 at the University of Alberta. It was a coup de théâtre--and its publication, after such a history, amounts to a brilliant and terrific cross through the double-cross-recrossed.

Performance space is dependent upon political space. If academic audience is in circle, stereo recorder should be placed at one end with the woman performer seated at the other end, one facing the other. If audience is in straight rows, recorder should be in front of room, slightly raised if possible. Woman performer should place herself at a small table (with microphone), facing the recorder, about half way toward the back of the room, to the left of the audience. Visual confusion for the spectators is a must. . . . Woman performer stands by recorder. She is introduced academically. Introducer then reads short introductory text. Woman performer slowly turns her back to audience and walks to position facing recorder. She is silent and looks very serious. Long pause. Introducer turns on tape.

Annabella Any resemblance to persons living or dead is totally coincidental.

man[1] Here's none but you and I. I think you love me, sister.

woman-recorded Yes, you know I do.

Annie-belle Postmodernist art is a 'fully problematized view of representation, in which to name (represent) an object may not necessarily be to call it forth, for there may be no (original) object [... but only] an originless play of the signifier . . .'

other woman There was a rancher who had two children, a son and then a daughter. A while after that, his wife died and was buried under two sticks nailed together to make a cross because there was no time, yet, to carve a stone.

Did she die of the loneliness of the prairie? Or was it anguish that killed her, anguish, and nostalgia for the close, warm, neighbourly life she had left behind her when she came to this emptiness? Neither. She died of the pressure of that vast sky, that weighed down upon her and crushed her lungs until she could not breathe any more, as if the prairies were the bedrock of an ocean in which she drowned.

She told her boy: 'Look after your sister.' He, blond, solemn, little; he and Death sat with her in the room of logs her husband split to build. Death, with high cheek-bones, wore his hair in braids. His invisible presence in the cabin mocked the existence of the cabin. The round-eyed boy clutched his mother's dry hand. The girl was younger.

Then the mother lay with the prairies and all that careless sky upon her breast, and the children lived in

their father's house. So they grew up. In his spare time, the rancher chiselled at a rock: 'Beloved wife of . . . mother of . . .' beneath the space at the top he had left for his own name.

Annie-belle The question is: What's in a name?

other woman Blond children with broad, freckled faces, the boy in dungarees and the little girl in gingham and sun-bonnet. In the old play, one John Ford called them Giovanni and Annabella; the other John Ford, in the movie, might call them Johnny and Annie-Belle.

Johnny This crisis, the loss of narrative, 'is equivalent to the loss of our ability to locate ourselves historically'. We need to resurrect the Narrative of Man's Collective Struggle!

other woman She would have said to him: it did not signify, my darling; I only did it with my brother, we were alone together under the vast sky that made us scared and so we clung together and what happened, happened. But she knew she must not say that, that the most natural thing of all was just precisely the one she must not acknowledge. To lie down on the prairie with a passing stranger was one thing. To lie down with her father's son was another. So she kept silent.

woman-recorded Oh, Johnny, you <u>knowed</u> we did wrong.

man[1] What are you going to tell Daddy?

Giovanni 'No more God, no more Subject, no more Philosophy of the Subject, no more Progress, Regress, History, Nature, Reality, Imaginary, Profit, Revolution, Repression, Represntation, Power, Meaning, Production, Dialectic, Judgement, Criticism, War, Liberation, Capital, Class, Change, Exchange, Fiction, Value, Society, Secrets, Scandals, Truth, Ideology, Politics, State, Fantasy, Alienation, Phantasm, Identity, Difference . . . Death. No more and/or much-too-much (no more Rarity, Distinction, Aura). No more Utopia (we're living in it). No more Linear Time, no Catastrophe, no Finality. No more Last Judgement: even the Apocalypse is over, and we're out on the other side.'

woman-recorded Don't shoot--think of the baby! Don't--

man[3] Oh, my God--

Bang, bang, bang.

other woman . . . 'If we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again. Don't you think so? Listen: all around us, men and women sound just the same. The same discussions, the same arguments, the same scenes. The same attractions and separations. The same difficulties, the same impossibility of making connections. The same . . . Same . . . Always the same.

Annabella And if that changed?

Annie-belle '[Then] all the history, all the stories would be there to retell differently; the future would be incalculable; the historical focus would and will change hands and change body--another thought which is yet unthinkable--will transform the functioning of all society.' But is it possible?

I don't know. For perhaps my attempt to dramatize the possibilities and effects of an expropriative mode, to retell the story differently, is itself an act of appropriation, complicit with the narrative of canonical postmodernity. But any hazardous enterprise, whether performance or premonition, engenders doubt along with recklessness and, in the doubled, crossing pull of those impulses, mediates and promulgates its own invention. If Carter's fiction serves as any measure, the invention and performance of a feminist postmodernism is above all vertiginous for those it engages; with luck, it also inspires theft and flight, produces cultural terror, and prophesies, when all is said and done, ***.

Post-Script II

I want to reflect, once again, on Barthes' notion of rereading, and more particularly on its resonant significance for the project at hand. This appendix comes at a considerable distance, both temporally and intellectually, from the first writing of my thesis. As a result, it constitutes a rereading of my arguments, and one inescapably bound up in the complications of "same and new" (Barthes 1974, 16). I suppose the sort of rereading that concerns me here is much more mundane, really, than that which Barthes intends--entailing in its practice and biography much less "play" than would amuse the philosopher (16). Yet too, if not play, still neither "consumption": rather, confusion as an effect of rereading, confusion with nothing "mythic" about it, confusion unlike "the effect of a drug," but confusion nevertheless extending directly from an experience of "the plural text"--as it was when I wrote it, as it becomes while I reread it (15-16).

The long and the short in this suggests that something has changed, or perhaps gone awry. In any case, I am no longer convinced by the thesis I wrote. What follows is an attempt, by grappling with difficulties I find in the text, to bridge that gap in

conviction, to find traces of the same amidst the new of my intellectual belief.

This proves to be a hard task, since in rereading I see the difficulties to be legion. Most glaring to me now is the slippage I allow, and even encourage, between "postmodernism" and "poststructuralism." This proves especially damaging in the first chapter. I seek to find, as early as page four, the prospect of a "canonical postmodernity." This clearly offers crucial leverage in my subsequent attempts to explore possible traits of an oppositional, subversive (read: feminist) postmodernism. Yet the notion of a canonical postmodernity remains too vague to function effectively. It presumes a circulating relation to philosophical poststructuralism in order to colour, as it were, its apples orange with respect to the matter of feminist practice. And such a presumption, however tantalizing with respect to the claims in question, remains untenable without considerable support in argument--support clearly missing from my thesis. Certainly, postmodernism and poststructuralism correspond historically and culturally, and moreover share several key epistemological concerns. Yet their interchangeability, dubious at best, requires strenuous argument for its demonstration. My ready assumption of interchange, lacking such argument, commands little

faith. I make no attempt to address differences in register between the realms of artistic and philosophical representation that would seem to distinguish postmodernity from poststructuralism, assuming instead that the philosophical concerns of a (wildly and problematically) diverse collection of poststructuralist theorists might adequately provide the mainframe on which to drape a notion of postmodern canonicity. Already problematic, this then finds further complication through its juxtaposition with the idea of feminist practice--an idea which in its turn brings the matter of action to bear on the tangled issues of art and philosophy. And if my aim in all this is to challenge and even jeopardize conventional generic or epistemological categories, that too needs clear and thorough elaboration. While it may be true that in some sense "the death of canonization," as a key concern of postmodernity, has itself become "canonized," nonetheless such a claim requires more than its own ingenuity (and, not least, considerably more clarity) if it is to produce a measure of conviction in my readers.

I suggest, early on in the first chapter, that canonical power becomes tactical power to the extent that it remains undetected. In retrospect, this holds the real stuff of my preliminary argument--a concern

for devices of knowledge and representation, and the power they afford. By implication, then, an enlightenment or detection of devices of knowledge would address tactical power tactically, materially, and thereby generate the sort of subversive potential I locate in Carter's fiction. But if, tactically, the exercise of canonical power requires a measure of disguise, how justly or persuasively can one consider postmodernity a monolith, grand, stolid, sluggish? And yet this is precisely what happens time and again in my thesis: canonicity provides the mould in which the burdensome po-mo is cast, given form, rendered static, loaded with doctrinal or mastering ideology. This view leads in turn to claims of the detection of "deconstructive legislation," of the "monolithic order" and also the "bonds" of representation, of the "insistently rigid edifice of gender" (a notion that even summary contact with Judith Butler's Gender Trouble, published subsequent to my defense, must explode), and so on and on. By thesis's end, postmodernity has about it something of the quality of an institutional corporation which, while not on a scale with that of the Catholic Church or the CIA, nevertheless cannot be successfully challenged merely by recourse to notions of counter-representation and an "elsewhere." Indeed, it strikes me now that in many

respects my talk of the inexpressible and the unknowable as modes of resistance gestures toward a sublimity very similar to that which I abjure in much postructuralist discourse.

All this is in no way to deny the misogynist, patriarchal cast of much postmodern literature and poststructuralist theory. I do mean to suggest, however, that any demanding consideration of these matters must contend with the considerable suppleness of the biases in question. To imagine a canonical postmodernity monolithic in character and repressive in tendency only succeeds in restricting vision alongside means of resistance. For a purely repressive hypothesis neglects the considerable ambiguities that allow, in any history of repression or prejudice, subversive attacks, and that at the same time jeopardize in often unforseen ways subversive aims. In retrospect, I would insist that postmodernity enjoys a resolutely historical character, and as such represents most accurately a set of political relations, a snarl entailing abundant patterns in and among gender, sexuality, ideology, ethics, aesthetics, politics, erotics, and so forth. And as such, its interest lies not so much in ontology--its canonical features, for example--as in activity--its political resonance with and against readerly and writerly desires.

In the face of these complaints, however, I feel that much in my thesis offers provocation, if not always persuasion. Indeed, in many ways those aspects of the thesis that, argumentatively, come up short offer considerable imaginative and provocative pleasures--largely through a flamboyance in style that enlivens gesture while complicating and enriching explanatory possibilities. There is something of the thief's work in the thesis I wrote that, for what good it's worth, brings it to the edge of the ring in Carter's fictive circus. It is in order to dispel the sense that all's darkness past the edge of this ring, and to reveal some hints of explanation at the back of flamboyance, that in closing I offer a brief glossary of what, along with postmodernism, I take to be my text's key terms.

* * * * *

1. feminism

Without question, feminism eludes definition through both its resistance to the prospects of definitional closure and its manifold and resonant variations. I would only observe here that it is dangerous to seem too comfortable with the notion of a single or unitary feminism, and likewise dangerous to understand its

practice only in utopian terms. For all its future promise, to my mind any feminism entails crucially present, immediate practice, catching up in its weave complex and supple materiality, the vibrant snarls of lived and living political, emotional, representational, and textual relations.

2. gender

As a topic gender is enormously complex and, like feminism, ill-suited to the business of quick definition. It strikes me, however, that in my thesis, by taking gender to signal only repressive identificational roles invented and implemented patriarchally, I underestimate wildly the manifold possibilities and complexities invigorating the topic. For a subsequent discussion of the issues, better than I could hope to provide, see Butler's Gender Trouble.

3. genre

The term circulates throughout my thesis, and in rather slippery fashion. I intend it to register not only differing types of literature, but more importantly textual conventions and, as such, authoritative expectations of textuality and its representations. This in turn enables an understanding of a number of seemingly extra-literary concepts (gender, for example)

as in some sense generic, shot through with textual implication and manipulation.

4. gothicism

While my first concern here is with matters of genre, I mean this term to suggest an atmospheric as well as generic practice. That is to say, in using the term I rely as much on its popular as on its literary-historical resonance--a resonance produced by stereotypical characters and features (castles, dungeons, crypts, vampires, werewolves) and also by more intangible factors like mood. This relaxation in the strict meaning of the term enables it to be used more readily to contribute to discussions of textuality in which much more than gothicism is going on.

5. romance

The discussion with which Chapter Four begins remains perhaps the most confused and confusing in the thesis. It relies on a conflation of features of romanticism with those of the romance, in order to draw out signs of solipsism from the latter genre. Behind all the talk of the romance as always already postmodern, however, stands a largely conventional sense of the term deriving from medieval and Harlequin traditions alike.

6. canon; canonical

In the thesis, my use of these terms registers only their usual orthodox sense. Yet, by holding firm to the view of a static po-mo in order to construct an authoritative opponent for my arguments, I neglect entirely the historical character of canonicity, the temporal and geographical flux of canons, and, crucially, the ambiguities and collisions within canons that incessantly jeopardize their coherence. My adherence to the view of a static canon also contributes to my failure to successfully establish the character and limits of so-called canonical postmodernity.

7. ideology

As is clear in the thesis, my use of this term neglects its traditional Marxian sense in order to profit from its looser, fashionable application. For theorists like Gramsci, ideology found its character in disguise, and lost that character in discovery or exposure. Currently, however, the term suggests the collective tenets of an articulated political philosophy, often one repressive or dictatorial in character; this is the usage I presume in my thesis.

8. hegemony

In its usual application, this term is much closer in sense to the definition that ideology has acquired. It is suggestive, too, of the matter of grand recits much debated in discussions of postmodernity. Yet if hegemony depends on tall tales, nevertheless that dependence entails a vicious bite, and thereby considerable danger for oppositional politics.

9. economy (of otherness; of gender)

This immediately suggests a kind of Marxian notion of exchange across borders of difference, an association that, if not entirely rigorous or responsible, is nevertheless to my mind stuffed full with resonant possibilities. For if a discursive construct like gender is understood economically, then the cultural, political, and discursive capital attendant on various engendered identities becomes more immediately negotiable. Here, it is important to mention that my conception of economics does not stop with notions of property and the proper. It likewise includes, as motivations for exchange: currency and its currents; fetishism; liminal qualities of exchange; historical conceptions of good and correct value and taboos against sodomitical values and pleasures (usury, buttfucking, and so forth); the relation of the

material body to material wealth and connected questions of essentialist philosophy (a key matter in poststructuralist/feminist inquiry); corporeal transaction and erotic transaction as problems in understanding differential transaction; in certain respects, imperialism; and ultimately desire--intimately tied to the invention and generation of interest--and its frustration.

Clearly, this is less a definition than an exploration of possibilities; but then, what more appropriate to an understanding of economy than an encounter with proliferation, in one form or another?

10. expropriation

"c. The action of taking (property) out of the owner's hands, esp. by public authority" (Oxford). Like economy, this term has a particularly Marxian resonance, suggesting as it does a rather more communal and proletarian view of the translocation of material or ideas than appropriation can. In this respect, my use of it in concluding my thesis is suspect, dodgy--but well-intentioned and useful all the same, and aimed at suggesting an extension, rather than a manipulation, of Angela Carter's representational project.

11. transgression
subversion

I choose to address these together because of my sense that they frequently become indistinguishable in the thesis. Their difference, however, is important to recognize; this, then, is not so much definition as clarification and even correction. Where transgression offers evident and even public defiance of accepted or imposed cultural or political wisdom, subversion, entailing similar aims, masks its approach and hides, for the most part, its traces. The distinction is, for me, largely that between overt and covert action, between revolution and guerrilla attack. And where transgression presumes defiance from the outset, the illusion of systemic compliance is key among subversive tactics.

12. phallocracy

Phallocracy suggests a government by the phallus. The notion is perhaps less concrete than its counterpart, patriarchy (although this may only be a question of usage); relying somewhat mischievously on a key term in Lacanian psychoanalysis, phallocracy registers repressive governmental control at Symbolic, and by extension textual, levels. Judith Butler's recent work on the prospect of a lesbian phallus does much to upset

the firmly pejorative weight of a term like this.

13. paranormal

Paranormality strikes me as a particularly useful term when discussing gothicism and, especially, lambent yet visceral fiction like Carter's. I intend it to suggest not simply things beyond the scope of normality, but rather the close and tangled connexion of the apparently normal to its exclusions. The paranormal not only derives character in opposition to the normal; it insinuates itself into the normal, and thereby disrupts the latter's certainties. Carter's "eldrich guerillas" comprise a perfect figure for paranormality.

14. elsewhere

Any attempt to define this term is extremely problematic. It has its origin in a version of feminism insistent upon the need to go beyond and render inconsequential the claims and work of phallocentric discourse, and yet, at the same time, insistent upon the impossibility of escaping the force and exercise of discursive power, a power itself always already entangled in phallocentrism. All this motivates my invocation of an elsewhere imagined discursively, held in discourse, and yet not answerable to--that is, not definable through--discursive

phallocentrism. Necessarily, then, the notion of elsewhere inscribes a paradox extremely resonant and provocative in its implications, while striving to shake free of the relative fixity of paradoxical definition, paradoxical control. Because definitional logic, a mainstay in the conventional rhetoric of the thesis form, meets its match in the notion of an elsewhere, that notion necessarily enjoys from the outset a vexed relation to (clarity of argument in) my thesis.

15. performance

The notion of postmodern performance aims to confuse and inmix matters of writerly and readerly authority, in order to suggest that, at least for a politically engaged postmodernity, directional and hierarchical relations of textuality, textual production, textual control, representation, and communication are not nearly so clear as literary convention would insist.

16. ***

This fabrication comes from a passage in Meese's Crossing the Double Cross (cited on page 16 of my thesis). In her text, embedded in one sentence among many, it provides provocative lexical flamboyance amidst dense and persuasive argument. I'm not at all

sure, however, that the same can be said of my use of this sign at the end of my thesis. Would that I felt more deeply its resonant contribution to communication, to argument, to performance in my text.

Notes

1. The idea of an "elsewhere," suggested here and previously, comes from Teresa de Lauretis' essay, "The Technology of Gender," where it is used to identify the space left unrepresentable by hegemonic, phallocentric discourses. It is a concept to which I will return, again and again, in the course of my thesis. See de Lauretis 1987, 1-30.

2. Ambassador: . . . . I understand you have broken all the mirrors.

Minister: That was to stop them begetting images.

(The Ambassador produced a small mirror from his pocket and presented it to the Minister, so that he saw his own face . . .) (38).

3. In a strong irony, it is the new breed of patriarchs, the young fundamentalist warriors, who rescue Eve from the romantic fate to which patriarchy would consign her, if it could; and their rescuing action is itself a function of a romantic, chivalric code.

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